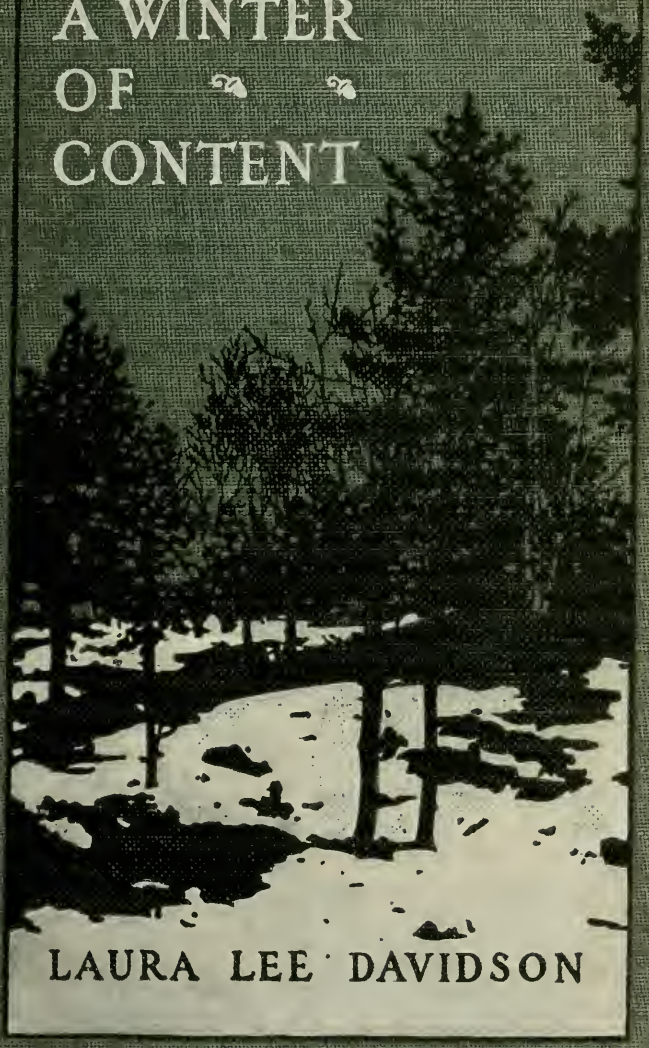
A WINTER OF CONTENT



LAURA LEE DAVIDSON

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"THROUGH PATCHES OF SNOW"

A Winter of Content

By

LAURA LEE DAVIDSON

"Now there is a rocky isle in the mid sea, midway between Ithaca and rocky Samos, Asteris, a little isle."

The Odyssey of Homer, Translated by S. S. Butcher and Andrew Lang

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To
LOUISE
The Lady of the Island

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CHAPTER I

A SMALL, rocky island in a lake, a canoe paddling away across the blue water, a woman standing on a narrow strip of beach, looking after it. I was the woman left on the shore, the canoe held my companions of the past summer, the island was to be my home until another summer should bring them back again.

There is no denying that I was frightened as I turned back along the trail toward the little house among the birches. It was hard work to keep from jumping into a boat and putting out after the canoe that was rounding the point and leaving me alone.

Little chilly fears laid icy fingers on the back of my neck. A shadow slipped between the trees; a sigh whispered among the leaves. I wanted to see all round me; I wanted to put my back against a wall. A little, grinning goblin of a misgiving stuck out an impudent tongue as it quoted some of the jeers of unsympathetic friends and relatives, who had derided my plan for borrowing the camp,

when summer was gone, and staying on alone at the Lake of Many Islands.

"Good-by," had smiled my sister. "You say you mean to stay a year, but you'll tire of solitude long before the winter. We'll see you back at Thanksgiving."

It was only mid-September, but I wanted to see her then at that very instant.

There had been a farewell dinner, the family assembled, to prophesy disaster.

"You'll freeze your nose and ears off," mourned a reassuring aunt.

In vain I reminded her that no inhabitant seen in five summers' sojourn at the lake had been without a nose or ears; all had had the requisite number of features, although some of those same features had withstood the cold of well-nigh a hundred winters. But she was not consoled, and continued to regard me so tearfully that I felt sure that she was bidding farewell to my nose.

"You'll break a leg and lie for days before anyone knows you are hurt," said Cousin John.

"You'll be snowed in and no one will find you until spring," said Brother Henry.

"You are a city woman and not strong.

What do you know of a pioneer's life? It is the most foolish plan we ever heard of," chorused all.

Descending from prophecy to argument, they continued:

"Of course you will have a telephone."

"That I will not," I answered. "I have been jerked at the end of a telephone wire for years. I want rest."

"At least you will have a good dog. That will be some protection."

"A dog would drive away all the wild things. I want to study them," I objected.

"Then, for mercy's sake, find some other woman to stay there with you. Surely there is another lunatic willing to freeze to death on the precious island. You should have a companion, if only to send for help."

"I don't want a companion," I protested, tearfully. "I won't be responsible for another person's comfort or safety. I will do this thing alone or not at all."

"I am tired to death," I stormed. "I need rest for at least one year. I want to watch the procession of the seasons in some place that is not all paved streets, city smells and noise. Instead of the clang of car bells and

the honk of automobile horns, I want to hear the winds sing across the ice fields, instead of the smell of asphalt and hot gasoline, I want the odor of wet earth in boggy places. I have loved the woods all my life, I long to see the year go round there just once before I die."

At which outburst they shrugged exasperated shoulders and were silent, but each one drew me aside, at parting, and pressed a gift into my hand.

"Be sure to let us know if anything goes wrong. Write to us if you need the least thing. Don't be ashamed to come back, if the experiment proves a failure"—and so on and so on, God bless them!

Of all this the bogy reminded me as he danced ahead up the winding trail.

The house looked lonely, even in the brightness of the late afternoon. I hurried supper, to be indoors before the twilight fell. Big Canadian hares hopped along the paths and sat at the kitchen door, their great eyes peering, long, furry ears alert, quivering noses pressed against the wire screen. Grouse pecked on the hill side, as tame as barnyard fowl. From the water came the evening call of the loons.

The scant meal finished, I ran across the platform from the kitchen to the main house and locked up. Somehow, I did not want any open doors behind me that evening. Then I loaded the pistol and laid it on a shelf at the head of the bed, along with the Bible and the Prayer Book. If any marauder could know how dreadfully afraid I am of that pistol, he would do his marauding with a quiet mind. I never expect to touch that weapon. It shall be cleaned and oiled when any of the men come over from the mainland, but handle it—never! I would not fire it for a kingdom.

While it was still light I climbed into bed, and lay down rigid, with tight-shut eyes, trying to pretend I did not hear all the rustling, creaking, snapping noises in the woods. Heavy animals pushed through the fallen leaves. Something that sounded as large as a moose went crashing through the dry bushes.

"A rabbit," I whispered to myself.

Creatures surely as large as bears rushed through the underbrush.

"Grouse," I tried to believe.

From the lake came stealthy sounds.

"Driftwood pounding against the rocks, not

really oars," I murmured to my thumping heart.

Then light, pattering footsteps on the porch.

In desperation I raised my head and looked out. It was a little red fox, trotting busily along, snuffling softly as he went. I lay down and closed my eyes firmly, determined not to open them again no matter what might happen, then must have dozed, for, suddenly I was aware of a light that flooded all the room.

There through the northeast window, large and round and beautiful, shone the moon, the great Moon of the Falling Leaves. It was like the sudden meeting with a friend, reassuring, comforting. A broad band of light lay across my breast like a kind arm thrown over me. The path of the moonbeams on the water seemed the road to some safe haven. With the moon's calm face looking in and the soft lapping of the waves as lullaby, I fell asleep—and lo! it was day.

This house, the living room of the camp, that is to be my home for the coming winter, stands on a bluff overhanging the lake. It is a one-room shack, 16x20 feet, surrounded by an eight-foot porch. It is one-storied,

shingled, the porch roof upheld by birch log pillars, beautiful still clothed in their silvery bark. There are eight windows, two in each corner, and through some of them the sun is always shining.

Adjoining this main shack and connected with it by an uncovered platform are the kitchen and storeroom, but these will not be used in winter. The stores and I will have to stay in the big house if we are not to freeze.

From these buildings little trails run off through the woods to the dock, the pump, the summer sleeping shacks, and a path goes all round the island close to the shore. Away from these beaten tracks are all sorts of hidden nooks and lovely, dim seclusions.

This little rocky island, one of scores that dot the face of the lake, is all a tangle of ferns and vines and wildflowers. It is thickly wooded with white birch, poplar and wild cherry. There are also oaks, maples, pines, and great clumps of basswood, and innumerable little cedars are pushing up everywhere.

Making a way through the overgrown paths in the early morning, I break through myriads of spiderwebs, stretched across from bushes heavy with dew. They feel like the

tiniest of fairy fingers brushing my cheek, and laid on my eyelids, light as the memory of a caress. Butterflies dressed in black velvet, with white satin frills and sapphire jewels, flutter on ahead, and the stems of the birches are seen through a gold-green glow, like sunlight shining through clear water. When I sit on the sandy bottom, with the whole lake for my washpot, small fishes, wearing coral buttons and jade green ruffles on fins and tails, bump their blunt noses against my knees.

Sounds from the mainland come across the lake, blurred and indistinct. On the island I hear only the wind in the trees, the water beating against the stones, and the hum of many insect wings.

There is something queer about the island. I am convinced that it stands on some magnetic pole or other, that puts every clock and watch out of order as soon as it is landed here. Cheap or fine, every timepiece breaks a mainspring, and then we fall back on the sundial to tell us what's o'clock. We can always know when it is noon, provided the weather be sunny. When it is cloudy we guess at the time and wait for the next fine day.

This sundial stands in a clearing beside the house, and bears for its motto, not the high-sounding Latin quotation that seems to belong to sundials, but the trite assertion, "Time is valuable." A statement wholly untrue, so far as this present life of mine is concerned. A fine bass, now, or a tin of beans perhaps is valuable, but surely not time, in a place where there is nothing to do but eat, sleep, and think.

Yet when I stood to-day, on this lonely bit of land, in the midst of an empty lake, waiting for the shadow to travel to the mark, I seemed to catch, for one fleeting instant, some idea of the terrible, inexorable passing of the hours.

"Set thy house in order, set thy house in order," something seemed to say, "for never, for thee, shall the shadow turn back upon the dial." In that moment I stood alone in space, on this old clock the earth, swinging with the whirling of the spheres.

The lake too has its mystery, a strange light that shines from the point of one of the islands. No one lives on that land; there is no farmhouse near it on the shore, nor is it in line with any dwelling whose light could seem to glimmer from its point. The flare is too

high and too steady for fox-fire, the glow that comes from rotting wood, and though men say they have explored the place repeatedly, there has never been any sign of a campfire there. But every now and again that light shines by night, like a beacon, and no one has ever explained it.

Perhaps it is the phantom of the council fire, round which the red warriors sat in the days when this land was theirs. For there were Indians hereabout, and not so very long ago; and people on the mainland tell of a great fight that raged here when a band of the Mississagua Nation, led by the chief White Eagle, fought with an invading war party and of a day of battle from dawn until the going down of the sun when the lake was red with blood. On the sheer face of the cliff of the opposite island are red veinings in the rock. If one pretends very hard, they are pictures of two war canoes left there by some artist of the tribe. The people here believe in them devoutly.

"They were painted in blood," they say.

A very indelible blood it must have been, for those tracings have withstood the wash of high water for many a year.

Whether the picture writing is genuine or no, there is plenty of evidence that Indians lived along the shores of Many Islands, and there is a pretty story told of the wedding of a girl, White Eagle's daughter, to a young brave of her tribe. The Indians came down the lakes and through the portages to Queensport, in their fine canoes, and the lovers were married there by the priest at the mission. Afterward they were all entertained at dinner by the big-hearted wife of the principal merchant of the town. That lady's daughter tells me that for many seasons thereafter the chief's daughter would bring or send beautiful birch baskets, filled with berries or maple sugar for the children of her hostess.

The bride is described as slim and young, with big, dark eyes. The wedding dress was dark blue cloth, trimmed with new-minted five- and ten-cent pieces, pierced and sewed on in a pattern—this worn over a vest of buckskin, beautifully embroidered.

What became of you, little Indian Bride, girl of the grateful heart? Were you happy here at Many Islands, or was it life-blood of your brave that helped to redden all the waters? Did you move back and back with

your wandering people, or are you lying under the cedars on some green slope of the shore? I shall never know, but I shall think of you and wonder.

There are no Indians here now, except one old squaw, who lives far back on the road to Maskinonge and tans buckskins in the fine old Indian way, but the plow turns up the arrowheads, and once in a while a bowl or pipe, proofs that the red men lived and fought here.

CHAPTER II

THE Lake of the Many Islands, long, irregular, spring-fed, lies in a cup of the rolling Ontario farmlands. At the south its waters, passing through a narrow strait, widen into beautiful Blue Bay. At the north they empty, in a series of cascades, into the little river Eau Claire. The town of Les Rapides, its sawmill idle, the ten or twelve log houses closed, stands at the outlet, a deserted village. The eagles soar to and fro over the blue lake; the black bass jump; the doré swim. There are hundreds of little coves and narrow channels—waters forgotten of the foot, where only the hum of insect wings and the rattle of the kingfisher are heard, and where the heron stands sentinel in the marshes and the loons have their mud nests on the shores.

"Crazy as a loon," that is, of all phrases, the most libelous. For the loon is the most sensible of fowl and possessed of the most distinct personality. No other water bird has so direct and so level a flight. He lays his strong body down along the wind, and goes, like a bullet, straight to his goal, purposeful, un-

swerving. He has three cries, one a high, maniac laugh, which is, of course, the reason his wits are slandered; then a loud, squealing cry, very like the sound of a pig in distress; and last a long, yearning call, the summons to his mate, perhaps, that he sends out far across the water—a cry that seems the very voice of the wilderness. At twilight, and often in the night, I hear that lonely cry, echoing down the lakes, and the faint, far cry that answers it.

"There will be wind to-night," the weather-wise say. "Hear the loons making a noise."

The birds come to the bay back of the island, and swim about there as friendly as puddle ducks. If I go too close, closer than Mr. Gavia Immer thinks safe or respectful, down he goes and stays for some minutes under the water, to emerge far away, and in quite a different quarter from the one in which I expected to see him. No one on earth could ever predict where a loon will come up when he dives. He looks at me austerely, twisting his black head back on his shoulder, until I would swear he had turned it completely round on his white-ringed neck. Then he gives his crazy laugh and disappears again.

The loon is protected in Canada. No one may shoot him or molest him. But once in a while one comes across a boat cushion made of a bird skin, its gray and white feathers very soft and thick and attached to the skin so fast that it is well-nigh impossible to pluck them. That is the breast of the loon, the great wild bird of the northern lakes, that the game law has failed to save. When I see one of these skins I hate the vandal who has killed the bird.

The Blakes are my nearest neighbors—not nearest geographically, for the Drapeau farm lies closer to the island; but near by reason of their many friendly acts and kind suggestions. If I am ill or in trouble, it is to Henry and Mary Blake that I shall go for help.

Henry Blake of the keen, ice-blue eye, the caustic tongue and the good heart. There was never anything more scathing than his condemnation of the shiftlessness and, what he considers the general imbecility of his neighbors, and never anything kinder than his willingness to help one of them in a crisis. He will sit for an hour, pencil in hand, laboring to explain to some unsuccessful farmer that wood hauled at next to nothing a cord can

only land the hauler in a ditch of debt, and when the hapless one has departed, fully determined to go his own way, to hear Henry spit out the one word, "Fat-head," as he turns back to his book, is a lesson in the nice choice of epithet.

When it comes to judgment on the manners, the morals, and the methods of their neighbors Henry and Mary Blake sit in the seats of the scornful; but, after all, they are somewhat justified, for they came over from "The States." Henry, an invalid, bought a run-down island farm, and they have brought it to a good state of cultivation and paid off their mortgage, all in ten years.

But while they are free in their criticisms of the natives, who live from hand to mouth, one notices that the Blakes are always willing to do a good turn, and are usually being asked to do one. Is a house to be built? Henry is called on to plan it. Does a churn spring a leak, or a cow fall ill? Mary goes to the rescue. Does a temperamental seed-drill choke in one of its sixty odd pipes? Henry is sent for to find the seat of the disorder and to apply the remedy.

I also went to him, when deliberating the

relative cost of a log house and one of board. Mr. Blake discussed the matter with me in the kindest way, summing up his advice in a sentence, that reached my muddled brain in some such statement as the following:

"It all comes to this. You can get one cedar log, 6x14 for twenty cents. Three goes into twenty-one seven times, so board or log, it would come to the same thing."

It wasn't what he said, of course, but I hastened to agree, lest I should be a fat-head too.

Everything on the Blake farm is a pet, from the handsome young Jersey bull, to the tiniest chick, hatched untimely from a nest-egg. They all run toward Mary as soon as she steps from the kitchen door, and as she hurries from house to barn there is always a rabble of small ducks, chickens, calves, and kittens hurrying after her. The other day, when she, Henry, and Jimmy Dodd, their adopted boy, set off for a tour of the lake, a calf swam after them, and tried so earnestly to climb aboard that, perforce, they turned back to shore and tied the foolish creature, lest he should drown himself and them.

Like almost every family in the country-

side, the Blakes have adopted a small boy, giving him a home and training and enough to eat, which he never had before in all his forlorn life. They are kindness itself to Jimmie, but Henry regards him with the same foreboding he feels for all other native-born Canadians. He trains him, but in the spirit of "What's the use?"

"Jimmie here," he philosophizes, "he can't seem to learn the first thing; and if he learns it, he can't retain it. I have taught him to read, but he can't remember a word; and to write, but he forgets it the next day. Mary even put him through the catechism, and a week later he didn't know one thing about it. So what are you going to do? I figure out," he goes on meditatively, "that the people who learn easy are the ones who have been here before. They knew it all in another life, maybe in another language, and all they have to do is just to recall it. But Jimmie here—well, I guess this is his first trip."

All the while Jimmie of the towhead and the thin, wiry legs and arms is grinning at his critic with a wide, snaggle-toothed smile of great affection.

The Blakes' house stands on the site of an

old log hut, of two rooms and a lean-to shed. In digging the cellar they came upon a walled-in grave—the boards almost rotted away—and in it lay a skeleton. Whose? No one knows, for that grave was dug before the time of anyone now living at Many Islands. Was it some Indian warrior laid there to sleep? Was it a settler of the old pioneer days? No one can tell and no one cares. The Blakes built their comfortable eight-room house over his bones and thought no more about them.

Yesterday Mary and I drove to Queensport, the county seat, fifteen miles away, that I might show myself at the bank and the stores where I am to trade this winter. The start was to be early, and I rose at dawn to have breakfast over, the cabin cleaned, and I myself rowed over to the farm. The woods lay wrapped in a heavy mist. Not a wet leaf stirred. The water looked like mouse-colored crêpe, and the sun hung like a big, pink balloon in a sky of gray velvet. But before our start the mists had burned away and the day was glorious.

The road lies through a rolling country, all hills, woods, lakes, and glades. Queensport

stands at the head of a chain of lakes. It boasts two banks, a high school, churches of all denominations, and a dozen or so shops and houses set in gardens. We dined at the hotel, the Wardrobe House; we transacted our business at the bank, and turned then to our shopping. We went to the harness shop for bread, to the grocer's for a spool of thread, to the tailor's to enquire the cost of a telephone. Then I bethought me of my need for some rag carpet. I did not really want that carpet that day, indeed, I had not the money to pay for it. I only thought of inquiring for it while I was in the town.

We were directed to the hardware shop as the most likely place for carpets, and I had no sooner mentioned my errand when a voice came out from behind a stove saying eagerly:

"I know where you can find just what you're looking for. My old mother has forty yards of as fine a rag carpet as you could wish to see. Say the word and I'll drive you right out to the farm and show it to you."

Whereupon a tall, wiry, keen-faced man rose up and dashed out of the shop, returning in an instant with a buggy and a wild-looking black horse. Despite my protests we were

bundled into the vehicle and driven at a gallop, through the main street of Queensport, and the driving was as the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi. Past farms and fields we flew, stopping with a mighty jerk at the door of the mother's house. There the carpet was rolled forth before me, and there Mary Blake and our energetic friend measured me off twenty yards of it, by a nick in the edge of the kitchen table.

In vain I pleaded and explained my poverty. Our abductor waved me a careless hand.

"Money," he assured us, "is the last thing that ever worried me. You may pay for the carpet when and where you choose."

On the way back to town my new friend was properly presented. His name was William Whitfield. Later I heard varied tales of his peculiarities. There was talk of a horse trade, to which Bill Whitfield was a party. The other man came out of the transaction the richer by one more experience, but the poorer as regarded property. It was told me that men said freely that Bill Whitfield drunk could get the better of any two sober men in the Dominion when it came to a bar-

gain, and, as I contemplated my roll of carpet, leaning against the dashboard, I understood why I had been as wax in his hands, and I could only be thankful that it had not occurred to Mr. Whitfield to sell me the whole forty yards.

Back we jogged, Mary and I, along the quiet roads, discussing our bargains and the news of the town. We passed the schoolhouse just as "Teacher" was locking the door for the night. The dusty road was printed all over with the marks of little bare feet, all turning away from the school gate and pointing toward home. The sun was sinking in a flaming sky as we came to the shore of our own lake, where the rowboat lay on the sand awaiting us, a pair of tired travelers, glad to be nearing home.

I would not be a bigot. To each man should belong the right to vaunt the glories of his own beloved camping ground. There may be other places as beautiful as this Lake of the Many Islands, although I cannot believe it. But Many Islands at sunset, its quiet waters all rose and saffron and lavender, under a crescent moon; when the swallows skim the surface and dip their breasts in the ripple,

and the blue heron flaps away to his nest in the reeds—Well! I shall see no other spot that so moves my heart with its beauty, until my eyes look out beyond the sunset and behold the land that is very far off.

I drift on past the islands, where the cedars troop down to the water's edge, and the white birches lean far out over the rocks. The colors fade, the far line of the forests becomes a purple blur, and stars come out and hang in a dove-gray sky. I land at the little dock, safe hidden in the cove; I scramble along the dark trail to the house, while the loons are laughing and calling as they rock on the waves.

CHAPTER III

THE days are still warm, but autumn is surely here. The wasps are dying everywhere and lie in heaps on all the window-sills; the great water spiders have disappeared, and all day long the yellow leaves drift down silently, steadily, in the forests. Wreaths of vapor hang over the trees, and every wind brings the pungent fall odor of distant forest fires. The hillsides are a blaze of color, with bass-woods a beautiful butter-yellow, oaks, russet and maroon and sugar maples, a flame of scarlet against the dark-green velvet of the cedars and hemlocks. Each birch stands forth, a slender Danæ, white feet in a drift of gold. The woods here on the island are thinning rapidly. All sorts of hidden dells and boulders are coming to light. Soon the whole island will lie open to the sight, and then there will no longer be anything mysterious about it.

Dried heads of goldenrod, life everlasting, and a few closed gentians are all that are left of the flowers; but the red and orange gar-

lands of the bittersweet wave from every bush, the juniper berries are purple, and the sumacs are a wonder of great garnet velvet cones.

From a walk round the trails I bring in an assortment of seeds: beggar's ticks, stick-seeds, Spanish needles, pitchforks—"the tramps of the vegetable world," Burroughs calls them. They cover my skirt, they cling to my woolen leggings, they perch on the brim of my hat. Little pocket-shaped cases, pods with hooks, seeds shaped like tiny twin turtles, and furry balls like miniature chestnut burrs. As I pick and brush and tear them off I wish I knew what plants had fathered every one of them.

At the approach of cold weather the small animals and the few birds that are left draw nearer to the house. Grouse are in all the paths, flying up everywhere. They rise with a thrashing, pounding noise and soar away over the bushes, to settle again only a little further on. Last evening, at twilight, two of them came on the porch, the little cock ruffling it bravely, wings dragging, fantail spread, ruff standing valiantly erect. A hen followed sedately at his heels. They are very pretty, about the size of bantam chickens.

How I hope that I shall be here to see their young in the spring!

This afternoon a red squirrel came round the corner of the house and sat down, absent-mindedly, beside me on a bench. When he looked up and saw what he had done he gave a shriek and a bound and fled chattering off toward the sundial. But he will come back and will probably be darting into the house when he thinks my back is turned, for there is nothing half so impudent or so mischievous as the red squirrel. I am told that they do not "den in" as the chipmunks do.

The rabbits do their best to help me get rid of my stores. There are hundreds of them about. They sit under the bushes, peering out; they appear and disappear between the dry stalks of the brakes. At evening they come close to the house, and catch bits of bread and potatoes thrown to them, then sit in the paths munching contentedly. They are not rabbits, correctly speaking, but Canadian hares, with long brown fur, bulging black eyes, furry ears, fringed with black, and very long hind legs. One of them comes so close and seems so fearless that it should not be difficult to tame him. I have named him

Peter. These hares turn snow-white in winter, I am told. Even now their coats are showing white where the winter coat is growing.

In the dusk the porcupines come pushing through the fallen leaves, snuffling and grunting. Away in the woods the bobcats scream and snarl. The natives accuse the bobcat of a pretty trick of lying flattened out on a limb, waiting for his prey to pass underneath, then he drops on its back to tear with tooth and talon. They warn me not to walk in the woods after dark, for fear of this Canada lynx.

But my natural histories say that, while the lynx sometimes follows the hunter for long distances, he does it only because he is curious, and that there is no authentic record of the bobcat's ever having attacked a man. So I shall continue to take my walks abroad, without fear that a fierce tree cat will drop on me. But late in the night, when I am waked by that eerie sound, that begins with a low meow, like the cry of the house cat, and goes on louder and louder, to end in a horrid screech, full of a malevolent violence, I cover my head and am glad that I am safe indoors.

I know that the lynx has come forth from his lair in a hollow tree and is hunting my poor rabbits.

There is no telephone line to the island; sometimes I am stormbound for a week, but in some underground way, the news of the neighborhood reaches me sooner or later. Therefore, when I came out of doors the other morning, I was instantly aware of a sense of impending disaster, that hung over all the landscape. There was no cheerful popping of guns in the fields, no hoarse voice bawled to the cattle. At Blake's the cause of the silence was explained. All the men round Many Islands had been summoned to the County Court at Frontenac, to be tried for the illegal netting and export of fish out of season. A knot of angry men had gathered on the shore, discussing the summons; anxious women hovered in the background; speculation was rife as to the identity of the informer.

It could have been none of our men, for the obvious reason that all were in the same boat. Black Jack Beaulac, Yankee Jim, Little Jack, Long Joe, William Foret, all had received the same summons. It must have been an inspector from Glen Avon.

"Did we not all remember a strange, white boat in the lake? That was, without doubt, the fish warden come to spy out for nets."

I know very little about the legality of nets versus hooks, or the open and closed seasons for fishing, but even to my ignorance there seemed grave doubts about the line of defense to be offered, and I was conscious that, being an alien and a "sport" (vernacular for sportsman, that is, summer visitor), the matter was not being freely discussed in my presence.

Next morning, while it was yet dark, Foret's motor boat was heard, chugging solemnly round the shore, gathering up the victims to take them to court. All day the women went softly, each wondering what was happening to her man, and devising means for scraping up the money for fines, if fines it had to be. Henry Blake went off to town to the trial, and the day passed gray and lowering.

At red sunset the boat turned in at the narrows, but before she hove in sight the very beat of her engine signaled victory. She came swinging down the lake, her crew upright, alert, the flag of Canada flew in the wind, her propeller kicked the water joyously. As she made the round of the lake, to Blake's, to

Beaulac's to Drapeau's, to the Mines, it needed none to tell us that all was well.

Foret touched at the island last to give news of the fight. The case had been dismissed for lack of evidence. There had been no conviction, no fines.

"How did it happen that there were no witnesses?" I asked.

Foret took out his pouch and stuffed his pipe carefully before he answered.

"There was eight or nine fellers there from Blue Bay," he said. "They looked like they'd come to testify, but, after we had talked to them a bit, it seemed like they hadn't nothing at all to say."

"What had you told them?" I persisted.

"Well, we told them that if any man felt like he'd any information to give, concerning netting fer fish, he'd best make his plans to leave the lake afore twelve o'clock to-night. We meant it too; they knowed that. Black Jack give them some very plain talk, Black Jack did. I guess," with a grin, "I guess that I was about the politest man there."

"I was fined once," William went on, reminiscently, "twenty-five dollars it was too, an' it just about cleaned me out. They put

me on oath, you see, an' of course, when a man's on his oath he can't lie. But the next time I went to town I seen a lawyer, an' he told me they hadn't no right to ask me that question. A man ain't called on to testify against himself. So now, when the judge asks me: 'Did you, or did you not, net fer fish?' I says, 'That's fer you to prove. Bring on your witnesses.' Howsoever," he went on, "as long as all this has come up, I guess we'd as well eat mudcats fer a spell."

So mudcats it was, until the herring began to run.

Foret has kept me supplied with fish this fall, explaining carefully that he will sell me pickerel, herring, and catfish but not bass. Bass, being a game fish, may not be caught for the market. I have paid for the pickerel by the pound and the bass have been gifts, for, as William justly remarks: "What are a few bass, now and then, in a friendly way?"

Foret is long, lean, powerful, with thin, keen face, steady, dark eyes, and the long, silent tread of the woodsman. Sometimes he works in the Mica Mines; sometimes he farms a bit, or fells trees. More often he hunts and fishes, but always he is a delightful

companion, because of his unconquerable optimism and fervent interest in all that concerns a matter in hand. He never admits a difficulty, no obstacle ever daunts him, and no one has ever heard him say an unkind thing about any living creature.

When William goes off to a dance, Jean Foret is wild with anxiety. When he drinks a bit too much and the other men throw him into a hayfield or a barn, to sleep it off, she ranges the county in a despairing search. When he sobers and comes home, subdued and bearing gifts, who is so contrite as he?

"Never again will I go to a dance. There's nothing to it at all," he assures you. "A man's better off to home."

But once in so often William takes his fling —only he is never ugly or quarrelsome when he drinks. Even when his mind has lost control, he is quiet and peaceable, they say.

The Forets live on the mainland, three miles off, along the shore. William is building their house by degrees. This season he went as far as the inner wall, frame, studding, windows, chimney, and floor. There is also an outer casing of builder's paper tacked on with small disks of tin. The whole edifice

stands on stilts, about five feet off the ground, giving fine harbor for the hounds, and a pig or two beneath. The first time I called to see them William made a great show of driving these animals forth.

"The boards is so thin," he apologized, "that it seems like I can smell them dogs up through the floor."

When I remember that one thickness of board and a few sheets of paper are all that stand between the Forets and the winter blasts, I shudder. Not so the Forets. They are apparently quite undismayed and look forward to the approach of winter without misgiving.

The house is divided into two rooms, each about ten feet square. There are lace curtains at the tiny windows, bright pictures, mostly colored calendars, a gay rag carpet, and over all the comfort of an exquisite neatness, for Mrs. Foret is the cleanest housekeeper imaginable—Jennie Foret, with her snapping, black eyes, her dark hair upreared in a militant pompadour, her trim, alert figure, and quick, light movements. Where did she acquire her love of order and her dainty, cleanly ways, I wonder?

It is a friendly place. Chickens, ducks, geese, cats, dogs, horses and cows roll, run, squawk, and squeal all over the hillside. In the cove before the house live-boxes are moored, motor boat and skiffs lie at anchor. There are nets and skins drying on the fences. Two bunches of ribbon-grass do duty for a formal garden, standing sentinel on either side of the path that winds to the door. The house looks away across the "drowned lands" where the wicked roots and snags of the submerged forest stand in the water, threatening navigation. The channel to the landing is winding and treacherous. But, once at the door, no guest is ever turned away. Wandering miner, tramp, bewildered emigrant, each is sure of a meal, a bed, and something to set him on his way.

CHAPTER IV

WILD geese flying over, cold mornings, colder nights, warn me that it is time to lay in supplies of firewood, oil and food against the coming of winter. Last evening a laden row-boat passed the island, going eastward under the Moon of Travelers. In the stern were a stove, a chair, a coffeepot, a frying pan, a great pile of bedding, and, surmounting all, a fiddle. The man at the oars threw me a surly "Good night," and turning, looked back at me with a scowl. It was Old Bill Shelly, the hermit of the countryside—trapper, frogger, netter of fish, and general ne'er-do-well. He has built log shacks all round the shores—little, one-room affairs, filled with a miscellaneous assortment of nets, guns, dogs, all forlorn and filthy past description. When one becomes uninhabitable, he leaves it and moves on to the next, but at the approach of cold weather he always goes into winter quarters at Blue Bay, and his flitting, like the flitting of the other wild things, means that all nature is getting ready for *"le grand frête."*

Poor Shelly! his is the only hostile glance that I have encountered in my wanderings. Even Old Kate, the witch at Les Rapides, has smiled at me.

"Mind Old Kate," the neighbors caution me. "If she ever crosses her fingers at you, it's all day with you then."

But when I met her in the road she spoke in quite a friendly way.

"Cold weather coming," she said. "Get in your wood."

Doubtless she thinks me another as crazy as herself.

So I must set about getting enough wood to last until the January sawing, and must pack eggs and butter against the time when hens stop laying and cows go dry, for there is no shop nearer than Sark, six miles away, and even if one could reach it, through the winds on the lake, or the drifts in the roads, there would be no butter or eggs to buy.

Tom Jackson, at the far end of the lake, has consented to sell me eight cords of hard wood; but to bring it to the island we must hire the big scow that ferries mica from the mines, and must have Foret's motor boat to tug it.

This life is a great education as regards the relative values of things. Wood and water, oil and food, are seen here in their true perspective. Already I have learned to rate the wealth of a family by the size of the woodpile, that stands, like a rampart in the dooryard, for I know what a big stock of logs means in thrift, foresight, and hard labor. I know what it cost to get my own wood to my hand.

City folk can pass a loaded woodcart without special emotion, indeed, half the time they do not see it, so concerned are they with the price of theater tickets, or the cut of the season's gowns. But I shall never look at one without seeing again a great scow moving slowly on the blue bosom of a lake, and I shall smell the delicious odor of fresh-cut maple, beech, and cedar, far sweeter than the breath of any summer garden.

Ah me! How prosaic will seem the city's conveniences of pipes and furnaces as compared with the daily adventure of carrying in the logs, and battling down a windswept trail to dip the pails into a pit of crystal ice water! Never again shall I turn on the spigot in a bathroom without a swift vision of that drift-filled path through the woods that

leads out on the lake, to where the upright stake marks the water hole, hidden under last night's fall of snow.

To one who has only to push a button or strike a match to have a room flooded with light, the problem of illumination is not perplexing. Here, the five-gallon oil tank must be ferried across the lake to Blake's farm; whence it must be again sent by boat to Jackson's shore, and there loaded on a wagon for Sark. Back it must come to the shore, to Blake's, and to the island storehouse—all this taking from ten days to two weeks, according to when Henry Blake is sending in to the store.

The city postman is no very heroic figure, but little Jimmie Dodd is, as he beats his way across the lake, and through the high drifts on the island, his slender body bowed under a great bag of mail, his small face blue with the cold. Letters mean something to us here. They leave the train at Glen Avon, they come by stage to Sark, then they follow the oil tank route over water and wood trails to me, and it takes as long to get a letter from "The States" as to hear from England, "The Old Country."

To-day a shrill, childish yell sounded from the water. There was Jimmie, in a boat, with a great basket of eggs. He was fending carefully off from shore, as the high wind threatened to dash his fragile cargo against the rocks. Before those eggs were loaded into the skiff a woman had walked five miles with them on her back. I spent a long, happy afternoon, standing them upright on their small ends in boxes of salt. When they were all packed, twenty-four dozens of eggs seemed a great number for one woman to eat, even if she expected to have a long winter in which to eat them.

The wood is all stacked on the porch, but it was hard work to get it there. The scow docked on a beach at the far side of the island, there the logs were gayly thrown ashore, and there Tom Jackson washed his hands of all further responsibility concerning them. The duck-shooting had commenced; no man could be found to draw that wood through the island to the house, so there it stayed.

At length William Foret came to my aid and promised to haul it, and I was jubilant. I did not then know that Foret will promise any one anything. No man can promise more

delightfully than he. He is always perfectly willing, apparently, to help anyone out of any dilemma, he recognizes no difficulty in the way, and to hear him make light of one's most pressing problem is to come to the conclusion that there is no problem there. So when William promised to get the wood to the house I believed him and was content.

Meanwhile the days went on, each colder than the last. Each morning I toiled to and fro from the beach, carrying enough wood, two sticks at a time, to last the day. Each evening I made a pilgrimage along the shore to Foret's to ask why tarried the wheels of his chariot. Sometimes he was at home and greeted me with a charming cordiality, more often he was away, fishing or hunting or cutting down a bee-tree. Always he was coming to the island the very next day. The Forets were cut to the heart to learn that I was carrying my own wood. But for this reason or that, William would have been there long ago. I was not to worry at all. That fuel would be stacked before the snow fell.

I always started to Foret's with wrath in my heart, I always left there soothed and comforted, and by the time I had eaten supper in

the boat, had watched the sunset over the islands, and had listened to the bell on Blake's old red cow, I would go to bed really believing that William was coming the next day.

Sure enough, he did appear one afternoon and attacked the woodpile with a very fury of energy, trundling load after load up the trail for perhaps an hour. Suddenly he sat down his barrow and gazed fixedly out across the lake.

"There, I heard my gun," he observed. "It's two fellers from Glen Avon, come to have me cut them down a bee-tree. I told the woman"—meaning Mrs. Foret—"to take the little rifle and shoot three times if they come, an' that's her. I got to go."

"Oh, Mr. Foret!" I expostulated, almost with tears, "have you the heart to leave this wood? Here, you take my pistol and shoot for them to come over and lend a hand with this work."

But William was already climbing into his boat.

"It's the little rifle," he said, sentimentally, "I've got to go," and away he chugged, leaving me raging on the shore.

After all he did come back, and the very

next day, Mrs. Foret and little Emmie, their adopted child, with him. We all carried wood, Jean and I in baskets, little Emmie, one stick at a time in her small arms. By evening it was all stacked and we were exhausted. There it stands, eight feet high, all round the house and the place looks like a stockade.

After supper William cleaned and oiled the famous pistol; we women washed the dishes and little Emmie skirmished about, getting in every one's way, while Jean Foret shrieked dire threats of the laying on of a "gad" that one knew would never be applied. The crows flew home across the sky. The child crept close to William's side and fell asleep. He moved the heavy little head very gently, until it rested more comfortably against his great shoulder.

"Our little girl would have been just the age of this one, if she had lived," he said.

There was a sudden hush, while I remembered the Foret baby that had died at birth, when Jennie had almost died too, and when Dr. Le Baron had said that she could never have another.

Presently we gathered barrow, baskets and sleeping child, and I watched their boat go

off, threading its way between the islands and points, a little moving speck on the amber water.

Across, on the shore, Joey Drapeau was plowing for the fall rye. His voice, bawling threatening and slaughter to the steaming horses, came across to me, softened by the distance. It was Saturday night. Soon the work would be done for another week. Then the men would go out on the lake, jerking along in their cranky little flat-bottomed punts. They would sing under the stars, girls' voices mingling with their harsher tones.

Little fiery clouds broke off from the sides of the crater, into which the sun had dropped, and were drifting across the quiet sky. A long finger of light crossed over the island and ran like a torch along the eastern horizon, turning the treetops to flame color and burnished copper, and the upland meadows to gold.

On the island the woods were dark, and somewhere in their depths a screech owl's cry shuddered away into silence.

CHAPTER V

NOVEMBER is the month of mosses. Every fallen tree, every rotting stump, every rock, the trodden paths, and even the hard face of the cliff, are padded deep with velvet. The color ranges from clear emerald, out through the tints to silvery, sage green, and back through the shades to an olive brown, almost as dark as the earth itself. Round the shores the driftwood is piled high on the beach. It looks like bleached bones of monsters long dead, huge vertebrae, leg bones, skulls and branching antlers. The trees are bare, the brakes dry and crumbling, but the north point of the island, its one naked ugly spot of the summer, is now covered with a blood-red carpet. A close-growing, grassy weed has turned brilliant crimson and clothed it with beauty. Far away on the lake I am guided home by that flare of color on the point.

The birds are gone, all but the crows, that perch on the tallest trees and lift their hoarse voices in a mournful chorus. But now is the time to go bird's-nesting, to find the homes of

all the vireos, warblers, creepers, and sparrows that made the island their breeding ground. The nests of the vireos, woven of birch bark, bits of hornet's nests, grass and scraps of paper, are easy to find, for the pretty, hanging baskets are fastened in the crotches of the bushes and low saplings. The others are not so readily discovered, and it was by merest accident that I came across the home of the brown thrasher, who made the summer vocal with his beautiful song. It was on the ground and so near the house that I wonder that we did not walk into it. It is a mere bunch of twigs, so loosely twisted together that it fell apart when it was moved.

Every afternoon I go faggotting, bringing in armloads of dry sumac and fallen branches. They are not especially good for kindling, but now that the deer season is on, no man will work; so until after November fifteenth, the reign of the Hunter's Moon, the brush pile must serve. It takes constant gathering to collect enough to start the hardwood fires, and a wet day sets me back sadly. I pile up as much as I can in the empty sleeping shacks, to keep it dry, and I can only hope that the snow will not come before someone has been

induced to lay aside his gun and cut a cord or two of driftwood kindling.

Butterflies are always coming in on the twigs. With their wings folded flat together, showing only their dry undersides, they look so like old withered leaves that it is only when the warmth of the room wakes them, and they flutter off to the windows, that they can be recognized as butterflies at all. One flew to the south window yesterday and crawled there, beating his delicate wings against the glass all morning. He was brown, tan and yellow on the upper side but underneath so like a dry, woolly old leaf as to be an amazing bit of nature's mimicry. As I looked at his poor, torn wings and feebly waving antennæ he seemed suddenly the very oldest thing, the lone survivor of a forgotten summer, a piteous little Tithonus, to whom had been granted the terrible gift of immortality, without the boon of an immortal youth.

At first I thought that he was being given a respite from the common fate of butterflies, for I did not then know that the angle wings can last over the winter, lying dormant in protected places, and that the last brood of a summer can live until another spring. I even

planned to outwit nature by feeding this one and keeping him alive in the artificial summer of the warm house. I made a sirup of sugar and water and offered it but the butterfly would none of it, only crawling and beating his wings in a vain effort to escape through the glass into the bleak November sunshine. At length I carried him to the door, and he fluttered off to a bush and clung there. After turning away for a moment I went back to find him; he was gone; he had become a dead leaf again.

"PETER, THE RABBIT, IS TURNING WHITE VERY RAPIDLY"

Peter, the rabbit, spends most of his time at the door, waiting for a chance crust. He sits on his haunches, rocking gently back and forth, making a soft, little

knocking noise on the porch floor. If I am late in coming out at mealtimes, he looks at me with so dignified an air of patient reproof that I feel quite apologetic for having kept him waiting. His meal finished, he washes his face and paws carefully, like a cat, then sits in the sun, eyes closed, forepaws tucked away under his breast and ears laid back along his shoulders. He is turning white very rapidly. At first, only his tail, feet, breast and the ends of his ears were lightly powdered, but now he looks as if he had hopped into a pan of flour by mistake.

Other hares, now lean and wild, come out of the woods at dusk and try to share Peter's bread. But he turns on them fiercely, driving them back over the hill, with an angry noise, something between a squeal and a grunt. If anyone thinks a rabbit a meek, poor-spirited creature, he should see Peter, when threatened with the loss of his dinner. Evidently, he believes that he has pre-empted this territory and all that goes here in the way of food, and he means to defend his claim.

Rufus, the red squirrel, torments Peter unmercifully, dashing across the ground under his nose and snatching the bread from be-

tween the rabbit's very teeth. He is there and away before the rabbit knows what has happened. Poor, slow little Peter stood these attacks in bewildered patience for a time, but now he has worked out a plan for getting even with the squirrel that serves him fairly well. He sits on his crust, drawing it out inch by inch from under him as he nibbles, but even at that Rufus gets about half. I am training the rabbit to take his food from my hand, for nothing thrown on the ground is safe for an instant from the little red-brown robber. It took some very patient sitting to overcome Peter's timidity, but after the first bit was taken the rest was easy. Now he comes fearlessly to me as soon as I appear.

The squirrel is growing very tame too, but he will never be as tranquil a companion as the rabbit. He lacks Bunny's repose of manner. He is sitting on the windowsill now, eating a bit of cold potato. He turns it round and round, nibbling at it daintily. Now and again he stops to lay a tiny paw on his heart—or is it his stomach? The area of his organs is very minute and it may be either.

There is something very flattering in the confidence of these little creatures of the

island. How do they know that they may safely trust my kindness? How can they be sure that I will not betray them suddenly with trap or gun?

The rabbit came into the house yesterday, padding about noiselessly on his cushioned toes. He stopped at each chair and stood on his hind feet, resting his forepaws on the seat. He examined everything, ears wriggling, nose quivering, tail thumping on the carpet. Suddenly he discovered that the door had blown shut and then he went quite wild with fear. He was in a trap, he thought, and tore round and round the room, jumping against the window panes, dashing his head against the walls until I feared that he would injure himself before I could reach the door to open it. Poor little Peter, he is not valiant after all. He comes in still, but always keeps close to the door, and the way of escape must always be open.

The men on the mainland hunt over the islands, putting on the dogs to drive off the game. When the ice holds, the hounds will come over of their own accord to course the rabbits. I should like to feel that for the term of my stay this one island could be a

place of safety for the animals that take refuge here, and so I have paid visits of ceremony to the neighboring farms to explain that I shall spend the winter and to ask that the dogs be kept off my preserve, as far as possible for the sake of my pets. I may say that my wish has been respected in the kindest way, and my neighbors have done their best to make the island a sanctuary for the birds and beasts. The first assurance of each visitor has been, "I tied up my dogs afore I started over." It was the opening remark of an early caller who strode into the room this morning as I was eating a late breakfast. A reassuring salutation, for without it I might have feared that the speaker had dropped in to do me a mischief, his appearance was so very intimidating. He was tall and very lean, a sort of cross between an Indian and a crane. His greasy, black hair hung in rattails on the turned-up collar of a dingy red sweater. He wore a ragged squirrel-skin cap, tail hanging down behind—which headgear he did not remove, and he carried a murderous looking ax. Following came a boy of about sixteen, whose smile was so friendly and ingratiating that I felt comforted when I saw it. The two drew

up to the stove, lit pipes, conversed, and in the round-about course of their remarks I gathered that they had heard of my need of kindling wood and had come to cut me a cord. Presently they retired to a secluded spot on the shore and chopped away, emerging every half hour or so to bring a load up to the house.

In this country men eat where they work, so toward noon I bestirred myself to prepare what I considered a particularly good dinner for my "hands." I had a theory that my chances of getting future kindling cut depended on the good impression made on these first workmen. I had corned beef, potatoes, peas, and tinned beans. I made hot biscuit, cake, stewed apples, and prepared the inevitable pot of strong tea. The man drew his chair to the table with perfect self-possession, speared a potato from the pot with his knife and remarked: "You ain't much of a cook, are you?"—adding, kindly, "I think I'll just try yer tea."

He assured me subsequently that he had no particular fault to find with my dinner. He only meant to put me at my ease and to make conversation.

When he departed in the evening, after

having cut and stacked an incredible amount of wood, he assured me that he would be ready to work for me at any time. I had only to "holler" and he would drop a day's hunting to come to my aid. So the dinner could not have been so unsatisfactory after all.

News of the Great War has come to Many Islands. William Foret returned from Glen Avon the other day with great tales of armed men guarding the railroad bridges against the Germans. He also brought the information that I am a German spy. He heard that at the station.

"That woman on the island is there for no good," the loafers were saying. "She's a spy. She's got a writing machine there an' she's sending off letters every day."

One inventive soul was even asserting that I am not a woman at all, but a man in woman's clothes and that there is a wireless station here.

But William stood up for me bravely.

"Spy, nawthin," he scoffed. "What could she be a spyin' on there on that island? There's nawthin' there but rabbits. No, as I understand it, she's some sort of a book-writer off fer health. She's got no wireless,

that I know, fer I've been over the ground there time and again."

But the crowd was not convinced.

"She'd ought to be investigated," they declared.

Then William rose to the occasion nobly. "She's no German spy," he said. "She's an all-right woman, and ef any man feels like makin' any trouble fer her, me an' Black Jack and Yankee Jim stands ready to make it very onhealthy fer him."

"I told them," added William, with a delighted grin, "that you'd a little gun here an' you'd use it on the first man that come on the island without you knowed him fer a friend. But I didn't say that you only stood five feet five in yer boots and didn't weigh over a hundred pounds."

Under the shield of William's favor and the wholly undeserved reputation of being a good shot, I continue to sleep o' nights, but I have no fancy for being investigated.

Last night a boat stopped at the shore, long after dark, and I was startled for a moment until I heard a chant that rose at the dock and continued up the trail to the house. Uncle Dan Cassidy had brought over the mail and

a Thanksgiving box from home, but he was taking no chances.

"Friends, friends, don't shoot, don't shoot," he sang until he stepped on the porch.

But while war and its rumors excite us, all topics pale in interest before the fact that the herring have begun to run. Whether battles are lost or won we still have to eat, a pig or a sheep does not last very long and the fish are a great part of the winter food.

"They save the meat," says Harry Sprigggins.

So when the first silver herring came up in the net there was great rejoicing. Then the little skiffs and punts started out, dancing and curtseying on the waves. The nets were stretched across the narrows between the islands, and, during the herring run, no other work was done. The season is short; there is no time to waste. The run began this year on the twelfth, the greatest catch was on the eighteenth, the fishing was over on the twenty-eighth. The fish do not come up except at a temperature of about thirty-four.

These are the bright, frosty days—days when the blood runs quick and the air tastes like wine; when the water is deep-blue, the

waves run high and the whitecaps race in to the shores.

The little boats bob up and down, the long nets come up spangled with the gleaming fish, and the tubs and boxes are piled high with the silver catch. As the fishermen pass they stop at the island and throw me off a herring or two. Every house on the mainland reeks; barrels and kegs stand in every dooryard, and everywhere the women and children are busy cleaning the fish.

CHAPTER VI

THE time of great winds has come, the heavy November gales that roar down the lakes, lashing the water into white-capped waves, dashing the driftwood against the rocks and decking the beaches with long wreaths of yellow foam. The swell is so strong and the waves so high that even the men do not care to venture out. When I must get over to Blake's farm I hug the shore of the island to the point, then dash across the channel between this land and his, and the wind turns my light skiff round and round before I can catch the lee again.

All night the house rocks and shivers and the trees creak, groan and crash down in the woods. I am afraid to walk the trails because of falling branches, for if I were struck down I should lie in the path for days and no one would know that I had been hurt.

These winds give the strangest effect of distant music. I am always thinking that I can almost hear the sound of trumpets, blowing far away.

Inside the house is warm and comfortable, with its creamy yellow walls of unpainted wood, its many windows, its pictures, its books; but I am lonely; I cannot settle to any occupation. The constant roaring of the wind unnerves me, the gray, scudding clouds depress me. A hound on the shore bays and howls day and night. I have heard no human voice for more than a week.

The storm died away in a smothering fog that settled down on the very surface of the lake, blotting out everything. I could not see one inch beyond the shore. The mainland was hidden, the opposite island was invisible —everything was gone except the land on which I stood. I could hear voices at the farms, the sound of oars, and people talking in the boats as they passed. Men were hunting on the mainland, almost a mile away. I could hear their shots and the cries of the hounds, but I might as well have been stricken blind, for all that I could distinguish. All sorts of fears assailed me. Suppose men should land on the island in the fog, how could I see to escape them? Suppose the fog should last and last, how would I dare to go out in a boat for any provisions? Suppose I

should be ill, or hurt, how could I signal to the farm for help?

By evening the fog had thoroughly frightened me; it was time to pull myself together. So I cooked a particularly good dinner, read a new book for awhile, then went to bed praying that the sun would be shining in the morning.

After being asleep for what seemed hours, I was aware of a loud shouting, followed by heavy steps on the porch and a voice calling as someone knocked and pounded on the door. I stumbled out of bed, half asleep, and groped my way to the lamp, fortunately forgetting all about the pistol laid by my side for just such an emergency. When the door was finally opened, the shapeless bulk of a woman confronted me—the very largest woman I have ever seen. She loomed like a giant against a solid bank of fog that rolled in behind her.

"I don't know where I am," she announced. "I'm all turned round. I've been rowing hours and hours in the fog, and I've a boy, a pail of eggs, a mess of catfish and a little wee baby in the boat."

"For mercy's sake," I ejaculated, "what are

you doing out in a boat with a baby on a night like this? Who are you anyway?"

"I'm from Spriggins' farm," she answered, "the place where you gits yer chickens at. I've been over at Drapeau's spending the evening and I started to row home two hours ago. But the fog got me all turned round, and when I struck this shore I says: 'This must be the island where the woman's at. Ef she's to the house I'll wake her and git me a light.' "

I gave her a lantern and she went off to the shore, while I threw fresh logs on the smoldering fire and tried to wake myself.

Presently a dismal procession returned: a boy, laden with shawls and wraps, the woman carrying a baby. When that infant was unwrapped, it needed not its proud mother's introduction to tell me whose child it was. Harry Spriggins is a small, wiry man, with sharp, black eyes and a face like a weasel. The baby was exactly like him. They were a forlorn trio, and, oh, so dirty! My heart sank as I surveyed them, realizing that they were on my hands for the night. Then I felt properly ashamed of myself, for if the poor soul had not found the island she might have

been on the lake in an open boat until daylight; and by this time a rain was falling, quite heavily enough to have swamped so unseaworthy a craft as her small, flat-bottomed punt.

For some time we sat gazing at one another, while I tried to determine what should be done with my guests. Finally I sent the boy to the storehouse for extra mattresses, and prepared them beds on the floor. Clean sheets were spread over everything. Probably the woman had never slept on clean sheets before, but I reasoned that sheets could be washed more easily than blankets, and just then washing seemed to me very essential.

About one o'clock we all settled down for the night, but not to sleep—oh, no! The woman was far too excited for that. Thanks to the fire that I had made, in my stupidity, and to the air in the cabin, I could not sleep either, so I heard a great deal of the inside history of the neighborhood, before morning.

I learned that minks are a menace to the poultry industry here about. In Spriggins' own barnyard, a flock of thirty-six young turkeys were found all lying dead in a row, with their necks chewed off—a plain case of

mink, and a dire blow to the finances of the family.

At three o'clock I had the life history of a Plymouth Rock rooster, of superlative intelligence, that always crowed at that precise hour. At four I was roused from an uneasy doze by the query: "Do you know anything about Dr. So-and-So's cure for 'obsidy'?"

After puzzling over the word for some minutes I gathered that "obesity" was what was meant, for my guest went on, pathetically enough, to tell me how hard her work was and how she suffered in doing it, burdened with that mountain of flesh.

"There's another cure," she went on. "It's Mrs. So-and-So's, but it calls for a Turkish bath, and where could I get that? Beside, I could never do all that rolling and kicking."

Peering through the gloom at what looked like the outline of an elephant on the floor, I did not see how she could, but I felt that if there were any known way of getting that woman into a Turkish bath I would cheerfully bear the expense.

At six I gave up the struggle and rose for the day, stumbling about from cabin to kitchen

to cook breakfast in the semi-darkness, for the fog was still thick. At nine, the day being a little lighter, I made the mistake of suggesting that the boy row over to Blake's for some bread and the mail. He departed, and stayed for hours. Soon his mother began to fidget and finally set off for the shore to search for him, leaving that changeling of a baby in my care.

There it lay on my bed, staring at me with its black beads of eyes, and looking as old as the Pharaoh of the Exodus and as crafty. The mother stayed and stayed away. I had visions of being left with that child on my hands all winter. I saw myself walking it up and down the cabin through the long nights. I saw myself sharing with it my last spoonful of condensed milk, but, as I surveyed it, I knew what I would do first. I would give it the best bath it had ever had in its short life and I would burn its filthy little clothes.

But while I was harboring these designs against that innocent child its mother came back, her hands full of green leaves. She had not found the boy, but she had gathered what she called "Princess Fern."

"This is awful good fer the blood," she announced. "Ef yer blood is bad, this will make it as pure as spring water; if it's pure, this will keep it so. It's good fer you either way."

The mention of blood led naturally to the recital of the various accidents she had seen, and I learned that there are several blood healers in the neighborhood—persons who can stop the flow by the recitation of a certain verse of Scripture. A man can perform this miracle for a woman and a woman for a man, but a man cannot cure another man, nor a woman another woman. This charm must never be revealed. It can only be transmitted at death. It is a sure cure for blood flow and quite authentic, according to Mrs. Spriggins, who has seen the blood stopped.

While we were discussing this mystery the boy came back, smilingly, from quite a different direction from the one in which he had been sent. He had never found the farm, but had been all this time wandering in the fog. It was all too like a nightmare. I did not tempt fate by offering any more suggestions. Instead, I bundled the party into their various wrappings, led them to their boat, and

turned their faces firmly in the direction of home. Then I sat on the porch, tracing their progress down the lake by the wailing of that wretched baby. When the sounds had finally died away, I went in and scrubbed the cabin from end to end with strong, yellow soap.

And the sequel to all this? She was not Spriggins' wife at all, but "Spriggins' woman," and she was not lost.

When I mentioned her visit the neighbors shook their heads.

"You couldn't lose old Jane on Many Islands," they scoffed. "She wanted to see you, that was all; and she knowed you wouldn't let her land if she come by day."

But two men were lost on the lake that night, and I believe that Jane was lost too.

With the rural love of scandal and the usual disregard of all laws of probability, the people accuse this woman of all sorts of outrageous crimes. It is said that she murdered her daughter for the girl's bit of life insurance, that she has strangled her own babies, that she bound her aged aunt face downward on a board, and pushed her out on the lake to drown. And here was I, all ignorant of the character of my guest, gravely discussing with

this alleged criminal the proper feeding of infants and the rival merits of toilet soaps.

I stopped at her house the other day to inquire my way. She greeted me with much cordiality.

"You was certainly fine to me that night," she said. "I donno what we would a-done, ef you hadn't took us in. The baby would a-been drownded, I guess."

Now I am glad that I was "fine" to her, for poor Jane is gone, and she died as she had lived—without help and without hope.

Her children's father was away at a dance in Sark when she fell in their desolate house. Seeing that she did not rise, one frightened child crept out of bed and covered her nakedness with an old quilt. In the morning two little boys, crying and shivering, made their way along the shore to the place where the man was sleeping off his debauch.

"Come home, Pop," they cried. "Mom's dead."

But he would not heed them.

"It's only one of them spells she gits," he grunted. "She'll be all right."

"No, it ain't no spell, Pop," they cried. "She's dead, I tell you. She's cold."

Then the neighbors, who had never gone to that house when Jane was alive, went now and comforted the children. They followed the poor body along the ice to its grave, and Mrs. Spellman, who has six little ones of her own, went over and took the baby home.

There are a great many of these irregular unions here, for Canada is no land of easy divorce. If you are a poor man, and have any predilection for being legally married, you must stay with the wife with whom you started. Divorce and remarriage are not for you.

In a little book of instructions for immigrants and settlers, published by one of the newspapers, the matter is made very plain:

"In Manitoba, Ontario, Alberta, and Saskatchewan there is no divorce court. Application must be made to the Dominion Parliament, by means of a private bill, praying for relief by reason of adultery, or adultery and cruelty, if it is the wife who is seeking a divorce from her husband. The charges made are investigated by a special committee of the Senate, and, if a favorable report is presented to the House, the bill usually passes." But the little book goes on to state, very simply,

that "The expense of obtaining the bill is very great, exceeding in any event five hundred dollars."

So for men like Harry Spriggins, whose wife deserted him, or for Black Jack's woman, whose husband beat her, there is no way out. They simply take another mate, and stand by the arrangement as faithfully as may be.

CHAPTER VII

WINTER has thrown a veil of lace over the islands, a wet, clinging snow that covers every tree-trunk, rock, and stump, and turns the cedars to mounds of fluffy whiteness. The paths lie under archways of bending, snow-laden branches, and all the underbrush is hidden. The island wears many jewels, for every ice-incrusted twig flashes a cluster of diamonds, the orange berries of the bittersweet, each encased in clear ice, are like topaz, and the small frozen pools between the stones reflect the sky and shine like sapphires.

There have been snows since the first week in November, but this is the first that has remained, and how it shows the midnight activities of all the wild folk! The porch floor is a white page on which they have left their signatures. Here, by the storeroom door, are innumerable little stitch-like strokes. They were made by the deer mouse's wee paws. There are the prints of the squirrel's little hands and a long swathe, where his brush swept the snow. The chickadees and nut-

hatches came very early. Their three-fingered prints are all over the woodpile, and on the paths are the blurred, ragged tracks left by the grouse's snowshoes. Over the hill runs a row of deep, round holes, showing that a fox has passed that way, and the rabbit's tracks are everywhere.

Every day the water freezes farther and farther out from the shores, and it is increasingly difficult to force a channel through it to the open lake. The bay in front of the Blakes' house is frozen straight across, and I land far away on the point and scramble through the bushes to the house when I must go over for the mail. Frozen cascades hang down over the rocks, pale-blue, jade and softest cream color. The rocks themselves are capped with frozen spray and the driftwood wears long beards of ice.

Walking along the beach to-day I heard a great chirping and twittering, like the sound made by innumerable very small birds. Could a late flock of migrants be stopping in the treetops? I wondered. But when I searched for the birds there were none. The chirping noises came from the thin shore ice, whose crystals, rubbed together by the gently moving

water, were making the birdlike sounds. Now and then would come a sudden "ping" like the stroke on the wire string of a banjo, and sometimes a clear, sustained tone, like the note of a violin.

As the ice grew thicker these sounds all stopped and over all the land broods a profound silence. The winds are still, no bird voices come out of the woods; even the waves seem hardly to rise and fall against the shores. It is as though all nature were holding her breath to wait the coming of the ice.

"When the lake freezes over, when the ice holds," we have a habit of saying, and, looking across the uncertainties of the shut-in time, when I shall not be able to use the boat and when no one can cross over to me, I too am longing for the ice.

The boat can no longer be left in the water. Any cold morning would find it frozen in until spring. It must also be turned every evening, lest it fill with snow in the night, so I haul that heavy skiff out on the sand; and, sure enough, the accident, so confidently predicted by my friends, came to pass, for in the turning the boat slipped, and down it came, full weight across my foot.

I am somewhat a judge of pain. I know quite a good deal about suffering of one kind and another, but this hurt was something special in the way of an agony. It turned me sick and dizzy, and for several minutes I could only stand and gasp, while the trees turned round and round against the sky. When their whirling had slowed down a bit, and I had caught my breath, I hobbled down to the edge of the lake, kicked a hole in the thin ice with my good foot, and thrust the hurt one into the icy water. Then I spoke aloud! I did not in the least mean to say the words that came to my lips, no one could have been more surprised than I when I heard them, but with my horrified face turned up to the evening sky, and the consciousness that there was no way in the world of getting help if I were badly hurt, I said, "Great God Almighty!"

Thinking it over, I am inclined to believe that the ejaculation was, after all, a prayer.

Knowing that I should probably not be able to walk for days, I then hobbled to and fro from the house to the lake, filling every pail and tub. Then I carried in as much wood as I could, and at last took off my shoe.

It was a wicked-looking injury, a foot swollen, bruised, and crushed. I blessed my little medicine chest, with its bichloride and morphia tablets, its cotton and gauze, that made the long hours of that night endurable. For more than a week I did my housework with a knee on the seat of a chair that I pushed along before me round the cabin and the porch. No one came to the island, nor could I get far enough from the house to call a passing boat.

One afternoon there was a great sound of chopping in the narrows between this island and Blake's Point. I called, but no one answered. Later I learned that Henry Blake had left a herring net there and that it had frozen in. But at that time I felt only the faintest interest in whatever was going forward. They might have chopped a way through to China and I would not have cared.

The long days dragged on, while my hurt foot slowly healed. I may say here that it was never fully healed until the following spring. I had always to keep it bandaged even after it had ceased to pain and it was not until May that I could forget that it had been injured.

On the eighth the calm weather broke in a day of wild winds and flying clouds, when the waves rolled in on the shores, and the driftwood pounded on the beaches. At evening, when the storm had lulled, the lake looked like a wide expanse of crinkled lead foil.

Next morning I waked to a bright blue day and dazzling sunshine. At first I feared that I had been suddenly deafened, the stillness so stopped my ears. Then I realized what had happened. There was no sound of the moving water. The ice had come!

The lake was a silver mirror that reflected every tree, every bowlder, every floating cloud. The islands hung between two skies, were lighted by two suns. An eagle, soaring over the lake, saw his double far below, even to his white back, that flashed in the sunlight when he wheeled.

In the glancing beauty of that morning my heart flung open all her doors, my breath came quickly, and my spirit sang. For the first time in my life I understood how frost and cold, how ice and snow, can praise and magnify the Lord.

That evening the snow came, turning the

lake into a vast white plain "white as no fuller on earth could white it," that lay without spot or wrinkle under the Indian's Moon of the Snowshoes.

This was the ninth of the month. Then followed long, silent days, when I read and sewed and dreamed, and forgot what day of the week it was, or what time of the day, and wondered how long it would be before someone could come over from the mainland to tell me that the ice was safe to walk on.

Each afternoon I hobbled to the beach and paraded there, according to agreement with Mary Blake, to let her see that I was still alive. The rabbit came in and sat by the fire —a queer, silent little companion. The red squirrel scampered all over the outside of the house, peeping at me through the windows, and whisking in at the open door to steal a potato or a nut, when he thought my back was turned. Funny little Rufus! He spent a long, hard-working day, stealing the contents of a basket of frozen potatoes put out for his amusement. For months afterward I found those potatoes, hard as bullets, stuck in the crotches of the cedars all over the island.

From the ninth to the nineteenth I saw no

one and heard no voice. Then I descried two men walking across the lake. They carried long poles, with which they struck the ice ahead to test its thickness. Each stroke ran along the ice to the shore, with the sound

THE HOUSE

of iron ringing against stone. I saw the stick fall some seconds before I heard the noise.

I had never seen men walking across a lake before. I had never realized that this lake would become a solid floor on which men could walk. I shall never forget the excitement with which I watched them do it.

Half an hour later Jimmie Dodd burst in, with red cheeks and shining eyes, to tell me that the ice would hold.

The way to the farm being once more open, I made my Christmas cake, mixing it here in the cabin and carrying it three quarters of a mile across to the Blakes' big oven. The finished loaf came back over the ice, an excellent cake, as all my Christmas visitors testified.

For let no one assume that because the inhabitants of this island are few there has been no Christmas here. On the contrary, the feast began on Christmas Eve and lasted for a week. The tree, a young white pine, was cut on the island, the trimmings came from Toronto, and great was the anxiety lest the ice should not be strong enough to bear the wagon that brought them over from Loon Lake Station. But the final freeze came just in time, and we, the rabbit and I, spent happy days tying on all the glittering trifles that go to the making of that prettiest thing in the world—a Christmas tree. There was a big gold star on the topmost twig. There were oranges and boxes of candy for all invited and uninvited children round the lake, and when all was finished, our

first visitor was a storm-driven chickadee, that wandered in and stayed with us, perched on a glittering branch.

On Christmas Eve the Blakes came and had cake and coffee and viewed the tree. On Christmas day, came the little Beaulacs, from Loon Bay, some walking, some in arms, some dragged in a big wooden box over the ice, and were refreshed with tea and bread and butter and cake, after which they sat round the tree, regarding it with great eyes of wonder. Next day the Forets came to help me eat the Christmas duck and tinned plum pudding, and after them the Big John Beaulacs, from far back of Sark.

So it went, with a party every day, while the brave little tree stood glowing and twinkling at us all. It was interesting to note how many errands the men found to bring them to the island while the Christmas tree was standing, and how their heavy faces lightened at sight of it. Surely it fulfilled its purpose, sending out messages of good will and friendliness and the love of God from the feather tip of each tiniest twig.

At midnight on Christmas Eve I went out on the porch and walked to and fro there in

the biting cold. The rabbit, that had been sleeping, a bunch of snow-white fur, on the woodpile, hopped down and followed at my heels. The lake was a shield of frosted silver. The moon shone bright as day. One great star blazed over the shoulder of the opposite island—it might have been the very star of Bethlehem. So diamond clear was the air, so near leaned the sky, that I might almost have reached and touched that star. The night was so white, so still that I fancied I could almost hear the angels' song, and in the rainbow glory of the moonlight could catch swift glimpses of the flashing of their wings.

We walked there, the rabbit and I, until the cold drove me in, to sleep beside the tree and dream of a procession of little Beaulacs, creeping over the ice, each one with a star in his hand.

CHAPTER VIII

THE Beaulacs belong to a tribe of French Canadians that has peopled half the countryside. They have various nicknames—Black Jack, Little Joe, Yankee Jim, Big John, Rose Marie, Marie John, and so on. The Little Jack Beaulacs live at Loon Bay, round the point and three miles away. The road to Loon Lake Station starts at their landing. They live in a barn, a sixteen-by-twenty-foot log structure, banked with earth to keep out the cold. In its one room, along with a double bed, a cooking stove, table, sideboard, sewing machine, rocking chair, boxes, pots and pans, and a clutter of harness and old junk of all kinds, live John and Rose and the six young Beaulacs, beginning with sixteen-year-old Louis and ending with the baby. There is one door and a small window, that, so far as I know, has never been opened. In summer, when the door is left ajar, the room is apt to be further inhabited by hens, ducks, cats, and even a lamb or two.

The house stands in a clearing on a per-

fectly bare hill, but in summer, the whole slope is golden with sheets of tansy, and the small dug-out milk house is shaded by a giant lilac bush, sole remnant of some long-forgotten garden. At the foot of the hill, rotting, flat-bottomed boats wallow in the mud, and there the little Beaulacs spend happy days fishing for mudcats, wading for frogs, screaming, wrangling, and throwing stones into the water.

They have not always lived in a barn. They have had two other houses, each burned to the ground, with all the pitiful furnishings it contained—crushing blows to people as poor as the Beaulacs. After the last fire they moved into the barn, the only shelter left standing, intending to build again in the spring. But log-hauling is work, building materials cost money, and time went on. Now they have settled down contentedly in the barn, and will stay there, I doubt not, until this roof falls down about their heads. They have no fear of another fire. That would be impossible, for, as one of the children tells me, the last one happened on the full of the moon—sure sign that they can never be burned out again.

Like other men of the settlement, John Beaulac works at the mica mine, hunts, fishes, and farms a bit. Rose walks barefoot over the fields, after the plow, digs the small garden, raises chickens, picks wild berries, and sells frogs to the summer campers, contriving thus to supply the few clothes and groceries needed. For the rest, they live a happy, carefree life in the open, and the young Beaulacs scramble up somehow.

Rose handles the boxes of supplies that come from Toronto for the island, driving them in from Loon Lake and bringing them across the lake by wagon or boat, as the time of the year permits. Last time she refused, very firmly, to allow me to pay for that hauling.

"We ain't agoin' to tax you nothin'," she declared.

When I expostulated, she only shook her frowsy head more violently.

"No," she said, "we do it fer you fer nothin'. It ain't like you had a man here to do fer you," she reasoned.

Then she looked at her own man with pride and at me with a vast pity, because I had no man to work myself to death for.

In a pioneer neighborhood, where every woman must have some man, however worthless, to hew the wood and care for the stock, and where every man must have some woman, to cook and to keep the house, however lazy a slattern she may be, I, who live alone, pay for my wood and draw the water, must be a creature not to be understood.

Yesterday the Beaulacs invited me to go with them to the races in Henderson's Bay —a trying out of the neighborhood horses before the yearly races to be held at Queensport next week. Scrambling and falling down the slippery trail, in answer to their halloo, I found a straw-filled wagon body set on runners and drawn by Beaulac's old mare. She, not having been "sharp shod," slipped and slid, threatening to break a leg at every step, while the wagon slewed from side to side over the ice. It was the first time that I had driven over a lake. My heart was in my mouth all the way.

Henderson's Bay, a long arm of Many Islands, stretches for a mile into the land. It is a beautiful horseshoe, with the farm house at the toe. The course was laid out on the dull green ice, little cedar bushes set up to mark

the quarter miles. An old reaper, frozen in near the shore, served as the judges' stand.

We drew up at the side of the track, in the lee of a high rock that somewhat sheltered us from the piercing wind. It was a friendly scene. The encircling arms of the shore stretched round and seemed to gather us close. The smoke from the house chimneys curled up to the low-leaning gray sky, and Henderson's herd, led by a dignified old bull, strolled down over the hill as though to see the race. Far away on the ice, black spots appeared, later discerned to be fast-moving buggies, sleighs, and wagons coming to the meet. When they were all assembled there must have been as many as seven vehicles. There were four horses to be tried. They were harnessed in turn to a little two-wheeled affair called a bike. There is only one "bike" here, so no two horses could run at a time, and there had to be a great unhitching and harnessing again after every trial of speed. Joe Boggs, the neighborhood jockey, drove with arms and legs all spraddled out, like a spider, and urged on his poor steeds with wild cries of: "Hi-hi-hi-hi"—enough to frighten a sensible horse to death.

I have never beheld a more professional looking horseman than Mr. Boggs. His disreputable old squirrel-skin cap, that hung off the back of his head, his high boots, the bow of his legs, the squint of his eye, even the way he chewed a straw between races, bespoke the true jockey. One felt that if Joe Boggs could not put a horse over the track, no one could.

Rose Beaulac too was a keen judge of a horse. She criticized the entries unsparingly —Rose, with her long, dry-looking coon skin coat, and her dirty red "tuque" cocked over one eye.

"That old mare," she would say, cuttingly, "I knowed her in her best days, and then she wasn't much."

That settled the mare for us. Our money was not on her.

There was, however, one horse that she did consider worth praise. She told me with awe that his owner had refused four hundred dollars for him—a staggering sum. So valued was this animal that he was not to be allowed to run any more until the Queensport races, but when it was learned that I wished to admire him, his owner consented to put him once round the course, for my pleasure.

After the contestants had each done his best —or worst—the meet broke up, with many "Good-days" and "Come-overs," and we drove back over the ice, the old mare plunging and sliding along seemingly quite accustomed to being driven, at a gallop, over a sheet of glass.

The eye swept the outline of the shore on which stand the seven homesteads of this arm of the lake. Each roof shelters a family of a different race and creed. Many Islands is a type of the whole of this strong, young country, that takes in men of all lands and minds, gives them her fertile prairies almost for the asking, and makes them over into good Canadians.

There are the Blakes, from "The States," and aggressively American; the Jacksons, Canadian born and Methodist; the Hendersons, English and Church of England; the McDougals, Scotch and Presbyterian; the Cassidys, Irish and Catholic; Harry Sprigggins, a sharp-faced little London cockney; and the Beaulacs, true French Canadian. Once in a while a Swede wanders in and hires out for the wood-cutting, or an Indian comes along through the lakes in his canoe, and camps for awhile on one of the islands. Amid

all the differences of belief and the clash of temperament, the people manage to be friendly and neighborly; the children play together; the young folk marry, and the next generation is all Canadian.

They all speak English, but when one stops to listen, literal translations of idioms and queer turns of phrase stand out. Foret always speaks of a "little, small" bird or tree or what not, and for him things are always "perfectly all right."

"Do yer moind thot pig, I sold Black Jack?" asks Uncle Dan Cassidy.

"'Ow har you to-d'y?" inquires Harry Spriggins.

"Oh, not too bad," answers John Beaulac. *"Pas trop mal,"* he is saying, of course.

When John has finished a job he stands off, hands in pockets, and observes: "That iss now ahl bunkum sah." After a moment's pondering one knows that *"Bon comme ça"* is what he means.

They speak of coming home through the "Brooly." That is the scrub wood through which a forest fire once swept. It is the land "brulé"—burned over. While they live in Canada their talk is of far away lands, and it

is to the "Old Country" that they mean to return some day.

And from the house on the island I see the life go by—the stern, bare life of the country —with its never-ending toil, its uncounted sacrifices, its feuds, its ready charities and the piteous, unnecessary sufferings of the sick. Blessed be the rural telephone, lately come to Many Islands, that has made it possible for Dr. LeBaron to reach a patient the day he is called. Thrice blessed the tinkle of those little bells that bring the voices of the world to the farms, shut in behind the snowdrifts. To the women, dulled with labor and shaken with loneliness, they are the little bells of courage.

I stopped at a farm the other day—a very lonely place. Scarce were the first greetings over when the young mistress of the house said, proudly: "We have the telephone here. Would you care to talk to any of your friends?"

Something in her tone, the eager shining of her eyes, brought a rush of tears to my own. It was the supreme effort of hospitality. She was offering me the thing that had meant life itself to her, the dear privilege of speaking with a friend.

CHAPTER IX

WE are at the very heart of winter now. It is *"le grand frête,"* that I have been secretly dreading, and all my ideas of it are changing as the quiet days go on. Winter in the woods has always seemed to me the dead time—the season of darkness and loneliness and loss. I find it only the pause before the birth of a new year. If I break off a twig, it is green at the heart, when I brush away the snow, the moss springs green beneath it. Close against the breast of the meadow lie the steadfast, evergreen rosettes of the plantain, sorrel, moth mullen, and evening primrose, waiting in patience for the melting of the snow. I never dip a pail into the hole in the ice without bringing up a long trailer of green waterweed, or a darting, flitting little whirligig beetle—the gyrinus—somewhat less lively than in summer, to be sure, but still active and alert. There is a big, fresh-water clam lying at the bottom of the waterhole. He breathes and palpitates, lolling out a soft pink body from the lips of a half-open shell.

Yes, winter here is only a slumber, and everything is stirring in its sleep. They all proclaim again the old, old covenant, made with the perpetual generations, that promise of the sure return of seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night, that shall not cease while the earth remains.

The colors of winter are slate-blue and gray, laid on a background of black and white. The chickadees and nuthatches wear them—black velvet caps, gray coats, white waistcoats. In the mornings long, slate-blue shadows stretch away from the points of all the islands, and every smallest standing weed casts its tiny blue shadow across the snow. The ice is darkly iridescent, like the blue pigeon's neck and head.

The dawns come late, the sunsets early, and in the twilight the mice steal out from the woods and climb up and down on the window screens, little misty, gray blurs moving swiftly against the soft, gray dusk.

Through the long evenings, when supper is over, the curtains drawn and the long sides of the big box stove glowing red, I read and think and dream. All the while the timbers of the

house crack and snap with the cold, the trees twist and creak in the wind, and the ice groans and mutters. Now and again it gives a long sigh, as though some heavy animal were imprisoned under it and were struggling to escape. I imagine him heaving at it with a great shoulder, grunting as he pushes, and sinking back to rest before pushing again. Late in the night comes a long roar, as though the beast had broken forth and were calling to his mate.

A POINT OF ONE OF THE ISLANDS

Most people undress to go to bed. Here I undress and dress again, putting on heaviest woolen underwear, long knit stockings, flannel gown and sweater over all. I creep into

bed and lie between flannel sheets and under piled blankets, and throw a fur coat across the foot, in preparation for that first hurried dash across the room at dawn.

There is only one anguished moment in the twenty-four hours. It is when the fire has burned out, and the cold wakes me. My movements then are reduced to the least possible number. Almost with one motion I spring out of bed, fling the window shut, tear back the whole top of the stove, throw in fresh logs, put on the coffeepot, then skurry back to bed to doze until the cabin is warm.

There is not the least trouble about keeping my stores cool. The problem is to prevent their freezing. The potatoes and eggs freeze in the very room with me, a pot of soup, set in the outer vestibule, is a hard block from which I crack a piece with the ax when I wish a hot supper. The condensed milk is hard frozen, the canned plum puddings rattle about in their tins like so many paving stones, and it takes all day to heat them. Early in December, I laid a jagged bit of ice on the corner of the porch, and there it lies, its shape quite unchanged through weeks of bitter weather.

There is an inch or two of ice over the waterhole every morning. When I go to fill the pails, I take the little ax along to chop my cistern open, but gradually the walls of ice close in and about once a week someone must cut me a fresh waterhole in another spot on the lake.

The drying of the weekly wash is a most perplexing thing. Clothes hung outside the house freeze immediately of course. If they are hung inside, the room is filled with their steam. My only plan is to heat the cabin red-hot, hang them indoors, bank the fire for safety and take to the lake or go a-visiting, for a certain number of clean clothes one must have, if only to keep up one's self-respect.

This morning I woke so stiff with cold that I was almost afraid to move in bed, lest a frozen finger or toe should drop off. There was no more sleep, so, cowering over the stove, I watched the sunrise, more augustly beautiful than I have ever seen it. The bright crescent of last month's moon hung, point downward, on a sky of mouse-gray velvet. Over it stood the morning star. Along the eastern horizon lay a line of soft brightness, that glowed through a veil of gray gauze.

Very slowly this bright line widened while the snow field grew slate-blue, then purple, and the jagged tree line of the forest stood out in silhouette, black pines, cedars, and hemlocks against a yellow sky. Trees and bushes near at hand stole out from the shadows, patterns of black lace against the white ground, and sharply visible. The horizon line was now tinged with red, the sky was changing to a tender yellow-gray, shading to pale green as it neared the zenith. The paling moon hung now against a background of rose and saffron. The star still blazed above it like a lamp, until, suddenly, a fiery streak appeared on the horizon, and star and moon faded away before the red disk of the sun.

Toward noon the cold was less intense, and I ventured out to get some long-delayed mail at the farm. Not a bird was abroad, not a rabbit track lay on the paths. In fur coat, fur hood, and high rubber boots I plowed a way across the lake, where the level snow, knee-high, drifted in over the tops of the boots and formed an icy crust around my stockinged feet. At the farm I learned that the thermometer at Loon Lake Station had registered thirty-five degrees below zero at seven o'clock

that morning. Even then, in the sun, on the Blakes' south porch it stood at twenty below.

At home in the afternoon all my little pensioners were out to greet me. The white-breasted nuthatch was clinging, head down, on a birch pillar, his head, twisted back at a neck-dislocating angle, showed his black cap perched over one eye, and gave him an indescribably rakish, disreputable appearance.

"Yank, yank," he observed, irritably, as though to chide me for keeping him waiting so long for food. The air was full of the plaintive winter notes of the chickadees. Peter, the rabbit, was sitting hunched against the kitchen door, a forlorn little figure.

The feeding of my live stock has become quite a large part of the duty of each day. The rabbit waits at the door for his slice of bread, and, if that door is left ajar, he is quite apt to hop inside and help himself to anything he finds standing on the hearth. The squirrel has his toast and cold potato on the woodpile, the birds their crumbs. The bushes present a very odd appearance, hung with bits of bacon rind for the chickadees.

The other night there came another little boarder, in the person of a very small deer

mouse, that slipped into the cabin and fell down between the wire screen and the lower casement of the north window. Between the netting and the window frame there is space enough to make a very satisfactory runway for a very tiny mouse, and there he cowered, peering at me, with terrified, bright eyes. The window panes open in on hinges, like a French casement, so my first impulse was to shut the upper half and keep him prisoner, knowing that if he once ran at large in the house I could never catch him, and that he would make havoc among the stores. He looked so hungry, trembling there, with his tiny, pink hands clasped on his breast, that I dropped him down a bit of bacon. Then he shivered so piteously that I dropped also a fluff of absorbent cotton, which he seized and instantly made into a little Esquimeau hut. This he placed in the corner best sheltered from the wind, turned its door in toward the glass, and retired, closing that opening with a bit of cotton, and I saw him no more by day.

A deer mouse is the prettiest little beast imaginable, somewhat smaller than the house mouse, and with very large eyes. His fur is dark brown, very soft and thick and with a

darker streak along the spine. His breast is white, his legs white too, ending in tiny pink paws with wee fingernails, the exact size of the eye of a number five needle. His ears are long and fringed with black, his head very much like the head of a doe. He is nocturnal in habit, staying up in the morning until after his breakfast and mine, then retiring for the day, to come out at twilight and run up and down the window screen for exercise. So long as I keep this window closed he can't get out, and I can study him through the glass at my leisure.

Who ever sees a deer mouse at home? Walking through the stubble field one sometimes starts one, and away he goes like a flash. Here I have this little wild thing living in my house, apparently quite content. He shall stay as long as he seems well and happy. When I think he is pining he shall go free, but he is quite as well off in his little hut as he would be in the cast-off vireo's nest that is, in all probability, his winter home. Snow drifts in and covers it, to be sure, but he seems snug and warm and is growing sleek and fat on a diet of bacon and apple.

Since the coming of the ice I find that I

must keep more cooked stores on hand, not only for myself and for the birds and beasts, but for the frequent visitors that come driving up the lake to the door. They race along the ice in sleighs and buggies and stop at the island. When they come they stay to the next meal, so there must be materials for a party always ready. It is only fair to state that the rule works quite as well the other way round, for I am always welcome to drop in at any house near which I happen to be at meal time. Any passing guest may draw his chair to the table and partake of what is set thereon. No apologies are offered for the food. It may be only a pot of tea and a biscuit, but whatever it is you are welcome, and that, by your leave, is hospitality.

Oh, Many Islands, place of the good neighbors! I close my eyes to see picture after picture passing across the screen of memory. There is Henry Blake giving his time and labor that my house may be warm and weather proof; there is Mary Blake with daily gifts of good things to eat and counsel for my inexperience. I see the little fishing boats bobbing against the rocks as the men stop at the island to throw me off a bass and some silver herring

as they pass with the day's catch. There are John Beaulac's two little girls scrambling through the bushes to bring me some venison when father has killed a deer, and I see Anna Jackson putting a big jug of maple syrup in the sleigh that brings me home on a Sunday.

I see too Granny Drapeau's earnest old face, as I hear her say:

"Eh, but I was feared for you last night, when the wind blowed so strong. I couldn't sleep fer thinkin' of you, all alone on that island. Come daylight I says to Andy, 'Look over an' tell if you kin see her smoke.' For if ever that smoke is not a'risin' I'll send one of the men over to see what's wrong."

Daily kindnesses, daily acts of friendliness for the stranger woman, who came from nowhere, to stay awhile and will go away, they know not where.

CHAPTER X

JANUARY the twenty-second was a great day in the county. It was the date of the "Tea Meeting," given under the auspices of the English Church, for the benefit of the destitute Belgians. It was also a great day for me, being the first and the last time that I shall appear in Many Islands' society, when society meets at night. To drive seven miles in the bitter cold, to return to a stone cold house in the middle of the night, requires a love of foregathering with one's fellows that I do not possess. So not until I have trained the rabbit to keep up the fire shall I venture out at night again. I had been invited to the festivity by Mrs. Jackson weeks before. Having very little notion of the proper dress for such an occasion, I ventured to ask counsel of a young visitor who dropped in opportunely.

"What do the women wear to the Tea Meetings here?" I inquired.

She surveyed me with an appraising eye.

"Well now," she said, kindly, "haven't you a nice, dark waist here with you? A lady of

your age would naturally wear something dark and plain."

At once I cast away all idea of a serviceably plain attire and determined to array myself in all the finery I had with me here; chiffon gown, long gloves and velvet hat with plumes. "Lady of my age, indeed!"

And when I arrived at the entertainment every soul was in her best, and my attire entirely appropriate. I waited with some pleasant anticipation for the moment when my little friend should spy me and was not disappointed in the expression that swept across her pretty face. As a plain dresser I was evidently not a success.

The start was to be an early one. In the middle of the afternoon I raked out the fire, fed the animals, hid the key under the woodpile and started down the lake to the Jackson farm, following a fresh-cut sleigh track that glittered like a silver ribbon flung down on the blue ice. Now and again the solid floor under me would give a groan and a heave and I would spring aside, my heart in my throat despite my knowledge of the two feet of solid ice beneath me. Then I would assure my quaking spirit that where the woodsleds could

drive I could surely walk, and would travel on.

At Jackson's there was a pot of bean soup on the stove, and, as a comforting repast on a cold day, I know of nothing that approaches hot bean soup—it stays by one. We drove off in the big farm sleigh, seven miles to the town of Fallen Timber, passing through Sark with its five houses and the Cheese Factory, and by farms each of which contributed its heavily laden sleigh to the long line of vehicles bound for the meeting.

The town hall of Fallen Timber stands on a bleak hillside. It is a room, about thirty by forty feet in size, with a six-foot wide stage at the end and a box stove in the middle. The stovepipe goes straight to the ceiling, across, and out by a hole in the wall at the back of the stage. The walls are of a dirty, leprous-looking plaster, with here and there a small bunch of ground pine tacked on by way of decoration. At the back of the stage a strip of once white muslin bore the inscription: "Welcome To All" in letters a foot high.

The seats are planks laid on the stumps of trees, the stage curtain is of red and green calico.

Now and again this curtain was pushed aside, disclosing the preparations for supper, and such piles of cookies, cakes, and sandwiches, I never expect to see again. In the phrase of this neighborhood there were certainly "plenty of cookings."

The great folk of the evening were late—the rector and his wife, the member of Parliament, who was to preside for us, and the orator, who was to address us. But we did not mind the delay. We had come to meet each other, and the time passed pleasantly enough. I was seated almost exactly on the stove, ventilation there was none, and the hall was packed, but what of that? It was good to feel thoroughly warm, at no expense to oneself, and there's too much fuss made about fresh air anyway—at least in the opinion of many of my neighbors.

The orator was the typical political speaker—portly, bland, slightly humorous and very approachable. He made an excellent speech, outlining the causes that led to the Great War, and telling of Germany's policy and her hopes. He explained the part that Belgium had played, in holding back the tide of invasion until France had had time to mobilize,

and it was all very clear and convincing. He laid stress on the spontaneous outpouring of loyalty in the colonies, and quoted one of the first messages received from India—the telegram from a Rajah that read: "My Emperor, what work has he for ME and for my-people?"

As he went on to enumerate them—Canada, India, Australia, New Zealand and all the islands of the seas—I forgot the little hall, the crowd, the heat, and caught something of Isaiah's vision of the Great House of God, that shall be exalted high above the hills, and of the time when all nations shall flow unto it.

After the speech came supper, huge plates of sandwiches and many kinds of cake, with pitchers of steaming tea. The men ate three and four of these platefuls with as careless an air as who should say: "What are five pounds or so of food washed down with quarts of strong, boiled tea? A mere nothing."

What was worse, the children ate quite as much as their elders, but I have long since ceased to forebode anything for the youth of this favored land. Apparently, they cannot be harmed.

After supper, at about eleven-thirty, came

the real object of the meeting—the entertainment by "local talent." It began with the chorus: "Tramp, tramp, tramp, the boys are marching." Followed then a recitation, "My Aunt Somebody's Custard Pie."

This was delivered in a coquettish, not to say soubrettish manner by a little miss in a short white frock, and with a coral ribbon wound round her curly, dark hair. Her assured manner struck me and not pleasantly. Later I understood it. She was "Teacher" in charge of Number Six, better known as the Woodchuck School. I am told that the Boards of Education cannot keep these rural schools supplied, the girls marry off so fast; and I can well believe it, judging by this one. She was evidently the belle of the neighborhood. In the comments that the boys were making all round me the other girls were all very well, but "Teacher" was easily the favorite.

"She's a good teacher," I heard one declare, hoarsely fervent. "She's did well by Number Six. I could make out every word them children spoke"—a fact that really seemed to give him cause for satisfaction.

The night wore on with drill after drill, song after song, recitation after recitation.

Despite my fatigue, I was interested. As I watched the audience something took me by the throat. It was somehow so pathetic. Those heavy men, those work-worn women were not interested because their children were being shown off. No indeed. They liked the performance because it was just at their level, and that fact threw a searchlight on the bare monotony of their lives. We finished at about two o'clock with "Tipperary," and "God Save the King," and, as every national anthem is an assault on the feelings and makes me cry, I sang and wiped my eyes with the rest.

The night skies here are seldom black, like the skies of the south, they are more often a soft, misty gray. The stars, instead of being sharp little points of light, are big and indistinct and furry. It is always light enough to see the road, even at the dark of the moon. We drove along through the bitter cold, Big John Beaulac's hired boy, Reginald, standing in the back of the sleigh, by way of getting a lift home. He was regretting, all the way, that some people had not eaten all their "cookings" and that so much good food had been wasted on the floor. I fancied that Reginald

Bean would fain have eaten even more than he did.

At the shore we dropped Mrs. Jackson and the three little sleeping Jacksons, and drove on down the lake. At the narrows I, being almost frozen to the seat of the sleigh, insisted on being set down to walk, and took my way along the side of the island, treading in the footprints that I had left in the snow when I had set out—was it the day or the week before?

I groped my way among the trees and along the trail to the house, lighted a fire and looked at the clock. I had been walking through the woods at four o'clock in the morning, and with as little concern as though it had been that hour of a summer afternoon.

Then, as though to rebuke my temerity, I was frightened on the lake the very next day.

I was walking briskly along on the ice, singing at the top of my lungs, because just to be alive on a day when the air was so cold and clean, the sky so blue and the snow crystals so brilliant, was happiness, when I came full on a figure that robbed the morning of its joy.

It was Ishmael Beaulac, the imbecile, shambling heavily along. He spoke, then

turned and followed me some distance, his air half menacing, half cringing, and I was frightened, for I realized that for miles around there was no one to come to my aid, if Ishmael should take it into his poor, crazed brain to do me harm. But he wandered off again, and, as I watched his bent figure shuffling away in the snow, I was shaken with a great compassion. I have never seen a face so marked with evil. Lined, swollen, and inflamed with some loathsome eruption, the low, receding forehead, with coarse, black hair growing almost to the line of the eyebrows, a wide, loose-lipped mouth, and cunning shifty eyes—it is a face that has haunted my dreams.

I asked Rose Beaulac about him.

"John and I was a sayin' that we'd ought to tell you about Ish," she said. "Now that the ice is come, likely he'll walk over to the island. But don't you be afeared of him. Just make out like you're goin' to throw hot water on him an' he'll run."

"Oh, poor creature!" I cried. "I couldn't hurt him."

"It ain't needful to scald him," said Rose, with an air of great cunning. "I always holds

my finger in the water to see if it's cool enough afore I throws it. He's awful 'fraid of water, Ish is," she observed, and remembering Ishmael's appearance I could well believe it.

"But don't you ever make over him," Rose went on, "and don't you ever feed him or you'll have him there all the time. Don't leave any knives or old boots around where he can git them. Ish don't know nothin' about money; he'll walk right past your purse to steal a pair of old boots. But he won't hurt you—at least we don't think he will."

"I have heard that his father, Old John, was cruel to him," I ventured, with some diffidence, for Old John or Devil Beaulac was Little John's own Uncle.

A look of distress flitted across Rose's face.

"Old John was a very severe man, very severe," she said. "He treated Ishmael awful bad. He must have hurted him very hard, for now when the men is teasin' him if one of them lifts an ax or a spade, and makes to run at him, Ish goes perfectely wild. They say Old John used to hit him on the head. That would make him so crazy-like, wouldn't it? Yes, poor Ish has had it awful hard, there's none but will tell you that," she sighed.

The neighbors are less reticent about old John. By their account he was a man outside all law, a giant in strength and of a fiendish cruelty. Finally his tyrannies grew intolerable, and his sons set on him, beating him until he died. Then they threw his body into an old mica pit, filled the pit with stones and went their way. No one interfered. The old man was thought to have earned his doom and the sons were never brought to trial. But even now, when poor Ishmael's fits of madness come upon him they say he goes to that pit and throws great rocks into it, cursing the memory of his father.

Much of this may be untrue, but the story haunts me. In the figure of this poor maniac, hurling his stones and shouting impotent curses to the unheeding sky, I see a time when the earth was young, when men dragged the offender out from the great congregation and stoned him to death before the face of an angry God. I marvel that in this place so near to civilization such stories can still be told.

CHAPTER XI

WE are no longer tenderfeet, the rabbit and I. We have come through a blizzard. For the better part of a week we have been "denned in" along with the squirrels, chipmunks, coons, bobcats, and bears. We have melted snow for drinking water, because the drifts cut us off from the lake and buried the waterhole. We have dug our firewood out from under a pile of wet whiteness. The mouse came through safely too, although the snow sifted in through the window screen, and covered him, house and all.

The storm began on the second of February, in the evening. All night long the wind howled with a violence that threatened to lift the house bodily and deposit it out on the lake. It searched out every crack and crevice, chilling me to the bone. It wrenched and tore at the heavy wooden shutters, it tossed and twisted the trees, every now and again throwing one to the ground with a grinding crash. It whistled, it moaned; and, with it came the snow, in blinding, whirling gray clouds that

blotted out everything. The lake was obscured, the outlines of the neighboring islands were lost. I could see only a smother of drifting, dancing flakes.

The day passed fairly well, for the mere necessity of keeping up the fire was an occupation in itself.

"This," said I to Peter, "is the beginning of the true Canadian winter. I hope it does not stay too long."

Peter, having been born last summer, has had no experience of any other winter. No memories of former blizzards troubled him. He hoped that the bread would hold out.

At about three o'clock in the afternoon Satan inspired me to go out on the porch, to survey the prospect. Immediately I smelled smoke.

Now, there is but one thing of which I have been afraid, and that is fire. A blaze started here would inevitably sweep the island and no one could stop it. I smelled tar paper burning.

"What a pleasant thing it would be to borrow the cherished summer camp of a friend and burn it down for her! What a safe thing for oneself it would be to go to sleep in a

smoldering house and have it break into flames in the night."

I sniffed and sniffed despairingly. I scrambled out into the snow to examine the chimneys; I burrowed under the porch floor to look at the foundations; I climbed the ladder to make sure of the roof, and still that smell of burning tar persisted. I had a horrible misgiving that there was fire smoldering between the outer and the inner walls.

There was nothing for it but to get to the Blakes and tell them of my fears. If Henry could assure me that there was no way of a fire's starting, I would believe him and go to bed content. If I had not that assurance, I should be forced to sit up all night waiting to escape into the snow. Whatever the weather I had to get to the farm; that was all I could think of.

I dressed as warmly as I could and set forth, through the drifts, to the edge of the island. I made fair progress until I stepped off the land on to the lake. Then I began to have some idea of what I, in my ignorance, had undertaken.

The lake was like the ocean done in snow. The wind had piled great breakers of snow

one behind another, their crests curled over at the top, exactly like the waves on a beach. Only these breakers were curled over the opposite way. They turned over toward the wind, not away from it. One long ridge followed another with a deep, scooped out furrow to windward. Looking down on the lake from the level of the porch, these waves did not look very high. When I stepped off into them they came up to my armpits.

Even then I had not sense to turn back; even then I had no idea of any real danger. The wind was at my back. I could feel it behind me like a wall, as I climbed through each succeeding hillock of snow and out across the intervening three or four yards of level ice. Wave followed wave, each higher, deeper, more suffocating than the last. Sometimes I could walk for a few feet on the top of a drift before sinking into its depths. I scrambled, fell, rolled, crawled, climbed, and thought that I should never reach the shore. Counting helped me, as I pulled each foot up out of the clinging mass and set it down a few inches nearer the land.

"One, two, three, four," I said aloud, timing my steps to the pounding of my laboring

heart. My breath was coming in gasps, a pulse beat in my temples, my head swam, there was a ringing in my ears as I plodded on, now with eyes shut.

A thin, washed out moon came out and looked through wisps of ragged clouds. Its light served only to make the scene more desolate, the distance from the shore more terrifying. The only idea that remained in my stupified brain was that I must somehow find strength to go on lifting heavy feet one after the other; that I must struggle up from each fall, must breathe deep and keep a quiet mind.

At last I reached the deeper drifts that fringed the shore, skirted the hidden waterhole, found traces of the cattle tracks, dragged myself along the path and finally stepped, with the very last remnant of strength, up on the porch and into the warm bright kitchen. When Mary Blake caught sight of me, she sat down suddenly and said: "My God!"

They had not attempted to get to the water hole that day, but had given the cattle melted snow. They had gone only as far as the barn and henhouses. Even the house dog had stayed indoors.

I gasped out my fears and Henry Blake

laughed at them. There was no way, he said, for a fire to have started and if one had caught, the house would have been flat to the ground long before I had crossed the lake.

I heard him with disgust. If that was the way my panic looked, it was high time for me to return to my home on the island. I rose with much dignity and walked off to the shore, before the Blakes had adjusted their minds to the move.

This time the wind was in my face, making the going ten times harder than before. About forty yards out from shore I stopped and turned my back to the blast to catch my breath, and there was Henry, dressed in his great fur coat, striding out after me and looking for all the world like a bear on its hind legs.

When I saw his thickset figure struggling against the gale it seemed suddenly a hatefully inconsiderate thing to have brought him away from his warm fire and out into the storm and I called:

"Go back, Mr. Blake. There is no fire. Don't attempt to come after me."

But Henry only stumped on.

"I know there's nothing burning," he re-

torted. "We're a long way more worried about you than we are about the camp. You might get confused and lose your life in this storm."

On he went ahead of me and I was thankful to follow humbly in his footsteps.

We reached the house, and, as we stood in the warm room fighting for breath, I said: "Mr. Blake, there is some Scotch here. Will you drink some?" And Henry said he would.

After that I was content to stay indoors until he came with the horses and broke the tracks through the island.

Such heaps of snow lay piled on the lake and in the woods that it should have taken months for it to disappear; but in three days there came a thaw and melted it all away.

The thaw came not a day too soon, for the sixteenth was the time set for the long anticipated sawing bee at the farm. During January Henry Blake and Jimmie had been felling trees and dragging them to the house in preparation for the arrival of the perambulating sawmill, that goes from farm to farm as soon as the ice will hold. There was a pile of logs, ten feet high by thirty feet long piled butt end

to in the dooryard. When a farmer announces a bee his neighbors gather from far and near, leaving their own work to help him put through the particular job in hand. He is expected to attend their bees in return. The farmer's wife, who earns a high seat in heaven if ever woman did, works for days beforehand, cooking for the ten or a dozen hungry men who will come down on her for dinner, supper and, perhaps, breakfast, with a night's lodging thrown in.

Mary Blake had made bread of the lightest and finest, had killed chickens, taken fish out of brine, and pork from the barrel; had made cakes and pies; had brought out pickles and preserves, and when I arrived she was creaming carrots and onions and boiling the inevitable potatoes.

It was a cold, gray day, with the surface of the lake awash. As I splashed my way through the water, ankle-deep on the ice, I heard the saw, clear and high, like the note of a violin. There were ten men working at the bee. The little gasoline engine was drawn up on a bobsled at the kitchen door, and even as early as ten o'clock it had eaten out a big hole in the side of the stack of logs. William

Foret and Jock McDougal were at the machine shoveling snow into the boiler, William in a bright blue jersey and with a squirrel skin cap set at an angle over his dark, eager face. Henry Blake was at the wheel, to take the sawed-off chunks from the feeders and throw them to the pile. The rhythm of his movements was exact. A reach toward the wheel, a heave, a toss over his shoulder to the ever-increasing pile of chunks and a return to the wheel—all this at the rate of a chunk every three seconds. This position, being the hardest work, is always taken by the host at a bee.

Little John Beaulac, Tom Jackson and Uncle Dan Cassidy lifted the logs and carried them to the saw, where Black Jack held them against the blade. There were two or three extra men standing ready to take up the work when one or more should be exhausted.

In the midst of the fray a sleigh was sighted, far out on the ice. It was bringing Jim McNally from far back of the mica mine. He had heard of the bee and had come, at a venture, for fear that Henry might be "short-handed." He brought a pail of fresh eggs for Mary Blake and a great sack of turnips.

There was a mighty skurry and mystery about slipping a bag of salt fish under the seat of the sleigh, for him to find when he reached home.

At half past eleven the men trooped in to dinner, with many facetious remarks about the strength of their appetites and the advisability of letting the dirtiest man wash first.

After a very short smoke time they were at work again and I sat at the kitchen window, watching the saw bite through the big logs. The men's rhythmic movements, the swift interplay of the bright colors of their jerseys, the long scream of the toothed blade, all lulled me to vacuity of mind. Long after dark, when I was back at home, I could hear the sound of the wheel coming across the lake. That song of the saw tells me just where the mill is working for the day. Going out on the porch I can tell whether the bee is at Blake's, Drapeau's, Foret's or the mines.

The Blakes are very up to date in their use of the gasoline engine. Many of the farmers still use the old treadmill, where four teams of horses walk round and round all day, turning the wheel. Invited to a bee at the Jacksons', the other day, I took a camera along,

for a picture of the old tread will soon be a treasured possession. The men had paused in their work in the kindest way to allow themselves to be "took." I was walking, with great dignity, down the slippery hillside, when a treacherous bit of ice was my undoing. I fell and my demoralization was complete.

Camera flew one way, walking staff another, arms and legs spread out to the four points of the compass, as I went shooting down that hill. When I had gathered my scattered members and my wits together, and was scrambling up with the foolish grin of the newly fallen, I looked appealingly at the sawing gang, expecting to hear the inevitable laugh. Not a face did I see. Every man's back was turned. The picture was taken amid a sounding silence.

Commenting on that display of good manners to Uncle Dan, I said fervently: "Never in my life did I see such perfect breeding. It is almost impossible to help laughing when anyone falls, but not one of those men smiled. I never expected such politeness."

Uncle Dan's Irish eyes twinkled.

"You'd ought to have heard what the b'ys said when you left," he observed.

Pondering that cryptic remark, I am inclined to think that it is just as well that I do not know all that is being said of me in the work gangs and around the kitchen fires of Many Islands.

CHAPTER XII

How do we know when the turn of the year has come? The calendar gives March twenty-first as the official birthday of spring, but that has nothing to do with it. One February day will be all winter, hard frozen and dreary, and on the next, quite suddenly, through some spirit line of sense, a message will reach us that spring, her very self, is on the way. After that, no matter how many days of sleet and snow may follow, we know that for us the winter is past.

So it was yesterday, here on the island. With a mind adjusted to the thought of weeks of snow and ice to come, I stepped out of doors and into the spring. The air was balmy as May, the sky a turquoise and the lake a pearl. The furry gray buds of the poplars had puffed out in the night. The three little fingers of the birches were swelling and lengthening. Suddenly my eyes were dazzled by a flash of bright blue light, and a magnificent jay darted through the air and perched on the bare branch of a basswood. After the

small, drab-hued chickadees and nuthatches, that jay looked as large as an eagle. Then I looked at little Peter, and lo! he was turning brown. The white hairs of his winter coat were falling off, his spring jacket was showing through.

The ground under the trees is dusted over with myriads of brown scales, chief among them the bird-shaped pods of the birches, that carry two wee seeds under their pinions. In the open the snow is gray with patches of briskly hopping snow fleas that move along over the meadows at a lively rate. The nature books tell me that these are insects that live in the mosses and lichens, and that they come out on warm days for exercise. They are exercising for dear life to-day.

Here and there on the white carpet are the fairy writings left by the wind last night. It bent down the dry tips of the sedges, and traced circles, bows, triangles, mystic runes that look as though they meant great news, if one could only read them.

But the snow still covers the ground. Rufus still tunnels under it, shaking the crust violently when he goes in for some hidden store of food. The rabbit roads, pressed hard

by hundreds of small, skurrying feet, still run crisscross under the cedars, and the heavy woodsleds still travel down the middle of the lake, like giant caterpillars, crawling along

Behind the opposite island the men are cut-

"THE HEAVY WOODSLEDS STILL TRAVEL DOWN THE LAKES"

ting ice. Uncle Dan stands at the side of a dark pool of open water, and works away with a saw as tall as himself. The rectangular blocks, two feet thick, slide up the inclined boards to the sleds and are driven

off to the icehouses in preparation for the summer's shipment of fish to the towns. They are beautiful, those blocks of ice, so clear and clean and blue.

With the fine weather has come the news that the Rector of the English Church and Mrs. Rector are coming to the island for a visit. The island is in much excitement. Salt bacon and potatoes do not seem just the right fare to offer guests so important and who are coming from afar. My mind is set on chicken, and the word has gone forth round the lake that "the English minister is coming and the woman on the island wants a fowl."

Now, all our turkeys, ducks, and chickens are fattened for the fowl fair, held at Queensport in December, when the poultry dealers from Toronto and Montreal, and even from "The States," go through the country buying up the stock. The greater part of the yearly income of some of us depends on the prices paid for the fowl. My only chance of having chickens through the winter was to engage a neighbor to save me a dozen young cockerels and to pay him for their feed, having them killed as needed. I had long ago eaten all these chickens and the prospect of getting any

more was slight. Even Rose Beaulac, fertile in resource, could give me no hope.

I never found the chicken, but I had a visit from Rose the day before the party. She told me that she had given John his gun and had sent him up Loon Bay to shoot me some grouse. Then the conversation languished. Rose is a very shy little woman; it took her nearly an hour to come to the real point of her call. She would not lay aside her coonskin coat, she would not remove her dingy tuque; there she sat, struggling with her errand.

At last it came out:

"Might she bring the baby to be christened when the Rector came?"

Then for another half hour she rambled on about people who never had their babies christened and what a sin that was, and of those who never registered their children's births, and how those children could never inherit property. Once in a while she said something about things "not being legal," until I was quite bewildered and do not know to this day whether, in her opinion, the unbaptized or the unregistered infant is not legal. But the upshot of it all was that the youngest Beaulac was to be christened next day.

The hour set for service was two o'clock, but such was Mrs. Beaulac's determination not to be late that she and the baby's eldest sister arrived at eleven. There was no sign of the father, John Beaulac. There I had made my mistake. I had let him know that a sponsor would be needed and that he was expected to stand. So when the godfather was demanded none could be found.

"Where was John?"

"Gone to Queensport with a load of wood."

"Andy Drapeau, the baby's uncle?"

"Gone to Glen Avon."

The other uncles were off hunting at Loon Lake; Louis, the eldest brother, had disappeared entirely. So when the time came for sponsors, the Rector's wife and I had to stand, and for this poor baby, whose father owns not one rod of ground, and who is sheltered in a hovel built for the cattle, we gravely renounced "the vain pomp and glory of the world." And because, in my hurry, I had forgotten to temper the water in the improvised font, the new little soldier and servant of Christ yelled valiantly when the ice water touched him.

It was a scene I shall not forget: the cabin,

with its bunk in one corner, its big stove at one end, the pots and pans on the wall behind it; the tools; the fishing tackle and the stores. The Rector, wearing white surplice and embroidered stole, stood in the center of the room beside the white-covered table that held the bowl of water and the Prayer Book.

Old Mrs. Drapeau, the baby's grandmother, had crept across the ice to witness the baptism, the first she had seen, she said, in twenty years.

The meeting closed with tea and cake; then the christening party withdrew, the little new Christian sleeping peacefully in the wooden box in which his mother dragged him away over the ice.

We three who were left settled to dinner and a long afternoon's talk. At teatime the Rector observed that the Woodchuck School was a mere seven miles away, and that he might as well have a service there while he was so near. So we dashed away across the lake, used telephones freely to collect a congregation, opened the school house, and, by the light of two guttering candles, said our prayers, sang our hymns, and listened to a simple, direct, and practical sermon. Back

across the ice I drove in the flare of the northern lights, that made the night almost as bright as day.

The Rector is a young man and an energetic one—and he has need to be—for his parish covers much ground. It extends from the church at Queensport, out to Godfrey's Mills, fifteen miles away to the south, and back to Fallen Timber, twelve miles to the north. Besides these three churches he has four or five irregular stations in the schoolhouses dotted about within the radius of his activities. On Sunday mornings he teaches the Sunday school at Queensport and holds service there; in the afternoon he drives to the Mills, and has Sunday school and Evening Prayer, at night there is service at Fallen Timber. Up and down the roads he drives, day after day, visiting the sick, baptizing the children, burying the dead. He consoles, admonishes, encourages; he reproves our negligences, bears with our foolishnesses, and somehow contrives to have patience with our ignorance.

Being a churchman to whom the decency and orthodoxy of services are dear, it is hard for him to excuse our lax ways. It gives him

genuine distress when we know no better than to drape our flags over the cross, and his face is set against the to us very pleasing decoration furnished by house plants growing in tin cans and set upon the altar. When he marches up the aisle and removes these attempts at ornament, replaces the vases and the cross where they belong, we say nothing. It is evident that we have made a mistake in our zeal. We don't try that again, but something else that proves just as reprehensible. But we are learning—the Rector sees to that. If only the Bishop will let him stay, we shall be good churchmen after awhile. But we say proudly and sorrowfully: "He's too good for a small parish like this. He'll be moved to the city soon."

The only way the Rector spares himself is in the matter of writing sermons. He confessed to me that he did not write three new ones a week, but preached the same one at all three churches, thereby reserving, I suppose, a few hours for sleep.

And with all this unceasing effort—and the clergy of all denominations work just as hard —there are families living here round Many Islands that have never entered a church.

They are as veritable heathen as any on the far frontier. There was a death at a farm on the road to Loon Lake station last week. The body was put into a rough box, thrust into a shallow grave, and the work of the farm went straight on. And the English rector, the Roman Catholic priest, the Methodist preacher and the Presbyterian minister all live within a radius of twenty miles.

Strange country, so civilized and so primitive, so close to cities and so inaccessible. Strange people, at once so old and so young, so instructed in vice and sorrow, and so ignorant of the simplest teachings of life. Grown men and women in body but children in mind, with children's virtues and with adults' sins.

CHAPTER XIII

SINCE the first of December we have not seen the ground—only a great field of white so dazzling that one understands the Indian's name for the March moon. Verily, my own eyes tell me why it is the Moon of Snowblindness.

The ice is still thick and clear, but the sun on its surface and the moving water beneath are both wearing it away, slowly, surely. There are clear pools on the lake at noon, and then the crows come down and drink, marching to and fro, like files of small, black-clad soldiers. They meet, and bow politely, speak to each other singly or in groups, then line up and off they go with hoarse caws. They look so important that they might be plotting all sorts of villainies.

"Look out fer yerself," laughs Uncle Dan. "I'll put the curse of the crows on yer."

A dire threat! What use to break one's back planting the corn if one's evilly disposed neighbor can call winged battalions of those black thieves to undo all a man's work and bring him to penury?

The snow is still thick in the woods, but on the hilltops and in the open, bare patches of earth are beginning to show. Peter's coat matches the ground exactly, being a sharply mottled brown and white. Indeed, he never did turn entirely white, like the wild hares in the woods. Even when his fur was its snowiest there was always a brown, diamond-shaped patch on his forehead, and, so far as I know, he was the only hare so decorated. No matter how far from home he strayed, I could always recognize him by his brown brand.

This simple life has its inconveniences. I was eating a belated breakfast the other morning, when bells on the lake and later a sleigh at the door announced a visitor. It was a perfectly unknown man who informed me that he had been sent by Mrs. Swanson to bring me to her house to spend the day. He had to wait outside, in the piercing wind, until a hasty glance round the combined sleeping, cooking, and reception room reassured me as to its condition for the entrance of a stranger. Then he sat beside the stove, pipe in hand, and inspected me gravely while I prepared for the long drive down the lake.

The day was bright and blue and snapping cold. A point of light flashed from every facet of the roughened ice. The horse was fresh, the wind at our backs, and we fairly flew past Jackson's, over the bare roads and out again on beautiful Blue Bay, lying like a sapphire in its setting of silvered shores.

The pony was a broncho, my companion told me, calling my attention to a brand to prove it. He was all that, and a tree-climbing broncho to boot, for soon we came to a perpendicular bank as high as the side of a barn, and I was given to understand that the pony was going to clamber straight up, with the sleigh dangling at his heels. I left the vehicle and scrambled up on my own feet, but the animal went up the side of that hill like a cat at a wall, and without one second's hesitation.

Arrived at the house I inquired of my hostess if my escort was her son.

"Oh, no," she answered. "It was only Clarence Nutting, the hired man."

Evidently, "hired man" means something very different here from what it has hitherto meant to me. It means friend, protector,

helper, and member of the family. Mrs. Swanson, Susie Dove, the hired girl, Clarence Nutting, and I all dined together; after dinner we played dominoes. When Clarence brought in the fresh eggs from the barn he suggested: "Better give Miss X some to take home with her." Later he invited me to come back, and soon, to spend several days.

Through the long, sunny afternoon, we sat round the stove in the pleasant best room, with its well-starched lace curtains, each with a bunch of artificial roses sewed on its folds, its oak sideboard decorated with rose-bordered crêpe paper napkins, its crayon portraits and wonderful, hand-made hooked rugs. We women had our crocheting, but little Susie sat very upright, her small, work-roughened hands clasped on her plaid-covered knees, her toes, in their shiny best shoes, just reaching the floor, while Clarence played for us on his new graphophone.

Clarence, in his high boots, patched trousers, and flannel shirt, handled his music box with the tenderness of a lover. He dusted each record after using it, as carefully as a mother powders a baby. As he played tune after tune, I saw in that instrument, God

knows what of pleasures foregone, and temptations put aside while he saved out of his meager wages the price of that graphophone. He had discovered a way to use the thorns from a hawthorn tree instead of wooden needles. They gave a very soft and lovely tone. His records were the usual collection sold with the machine—a few dances, a few Negro dialects and songs, some good marches and some hymns. After nearly a year of hearing no tunes at all, I enjoyed them, every one. When the concert was over, Clarence played: "God be with you till we meet again."

After tea came the sleigh and we drove home to the island, this time in a blinding snowstorm. Conversation was not so lively as in the morning. I was thinking of all the evidences I see here of man's unquenchable thirst for beauty and music and the pleasant things of life, that not the most incessant toil nor hardest privation can ever wholly destroy. I was remembering how I had gone over to the Blakes' to use the telephone one afternoon and had had to wait for an hour because Clarence Nutting's new instrument had come, and all the receivers on the line

were down while he played it for the neighborhood. I thought of poor Harry Sprigginss's delight in a magazine, of Mary Blake's habit of keeping a glass of fresh flowers in the center of her table, of the time when Mrs. Drapeau, having no white tablecloth, had spread a clean sheet over her table for company, and of the Beaulacs' joy in the blossoming of their lilac bush.

Then I began dreaming of a big, comfortable shack somewhere on the shore, to which the people could come, as to a common meeting ground, social differences and local feuds forgotten. I saw it furnished with a cupboard full of cups and plates, a piano or victrola. There should be a circulating library there and games, I decided, and I saw the boys and girls dancing, singing, cooking popcorn, candy and fudge, in the evenings. I imagined a group of women drinking tea and sewing while "teacher" played.

A few days later I went with the Rector and Mrs. Rector to drink tea with the wife of the owner of a big lumber mill, and there I saw what one woman has done amid just such conditions as are here at Many Islands.

There were the pretty little church, the

parish house, the Sunday school room, all built by Mrs. Baring, and I heard of the reading circles, the concerts, the cooking classes that she has organized for the people among whom she has had to live.

There too I saw the Canadian mother in war times and marveled at her. Mrs. Baring has sent the light of her eyes, the pride of her heart, the son who was winning honors at his university and had a great future before him, overseas to the trenches. I saw picture after picture of him—Harold as a baby, as a child, as a boy, as a man. He was shown in his little knickers, his first long trousers, his khaki.

"Yes, he is in France now, but of course we do not know where," the mother said. "I send him two pairs of socks, some handkerchiefs and shirts every week. The boys like that better than one large box occasionally—they lose their clothes so. We hope that things reach him, but we do not know. We have not heard from him for two months now."

All this without a tremor of the firm lips, with not the shadow of a cloud over the serene blue eyes.

The Rector told me afterward that not once has that mother alluded to the possibility of her son's return. She gave her supreme gift without hope of any reward. Withal her interest in affairs is as keen, her charities as wide, her hospitality as gracious, as though she had never a care in the world and her boy were safe at her side.

After supper we climbed over the slippery hillside to the church for Evensong. Our hostess sat at the organ at the side of the chancel and in full view of the congregation. During the service I watched her calm, clear profile. She went through the intolerably pathetic petitions of the Litany without wavering, as we prayed for those who are fighting by land and sea and air; for the prisoners, the wounded and the dying, and her sweet, steady voice led our responses. Only once did I see her falter. It was during the singing of the hymn. Her pretty ringed fingers went on pressing the keys; she played, but she could not sing.

"The Son of God goes forth to war,
A kingly crown to gain,
His blood-red banner streams afar,
Who follows in his train?"

Her eyes looked past us, straight across the world. Her lips were parted in a smile sadder than tears. She was shedding her heart's blood, drop by drop, for the safety of the empire.

We do not talk much about the Great War here at Many Islands. Indeed, it is only when I go to the towns that I realize that Canada is at war. Once in a while one of our boys speaks of going to the front, and only the other day Andy Drapeau was saying, "Ef it comes to drafting, I'll volunteer. I'll fight of me own free will. No man shall make me go."

But at that, Andy was merely talking. He had no idea of enlisting.

No, as always, it is the men of the cities who will go first, and the reason is not far to seek. It lies in the fact that the bucolic mind is almost totally devoid of imagination—it cannot picture what it has never seen. It can form no vision of an empire. It can think of this county as part of the Province and the Province as part of the Dominion, but of Canada as part of a great federation it cannot conceive—the thought is too big. Our vision is bounded by the limits of our own

experience. We know that Britain, France, and Russia are fighting Germany and Austria, but the fields of Europe lie very far away, while our own fields are very near.

We all know Germans. We have worked beside them in the hayfields and the mines. They seem good fellows enough, not companionable because they speak an outlandish sort of lingo that we doubt their being able to understand themselves. But why should we fight them? Of the Hun we can form no idea, thank God. He is outside our experience.

We have a patriotism, but it is local, parochial. If this war were a baseball game between the rival teams of Sark and Fallen Timber, we could understand it fast enough. We would "root" for our side and, if need be, fight for it. But the far-off struggle of nation with nation leaves us cold. We cannot picture it.

But when the first wounded came back from the trenches, and when the stories of Saint Julien and Festhubert were told at the firesides, then went the men of rural Canada forward gladly to fill the places of those heroes whose deaths are Canada's undying glory.

CHAPTER XIV

APPROPRIATELY enough, on this first day of the calendar spring, I am warned that the ice is unsafe and that I must stay on the island until the lake is open water. The natives still venture out, but they know the look of the thin spots and even they are very cautious. Two men started over from mainland this morning, axes on shoulder, hounds at heel, but they turned back at the shore, and the dogs, after stepping daintily on the dark, spongy crust, turned back also. The middle of the lake is still hard, but there are ditches of water round the edges of the land. The ice has heaved up into long fissures stretching away from the points, the clear green water showing between their open sides, and from this island to the Blakes' point there is a great crevasse.

Mary declares that she has known Henry to start off in a sleigh over the lake when the ice was only three inches thick; when he had to drive fast to keep from breaking in and when the water spurted up from the holes

made by the horse's hoofs. But Henry was going for the mail, and when he has been deprived of news for two or three weeks, the papers become things to risk one's life for—which is proof that Henry will never be a true Many Islander. The rest of us are quite willing to wait until spring, if need be.

So I am "denned in" once more, and before I am free all sorts of things will have happened. There will be hundreds of little new calves and lambs lying beside their mothers in the meadows, and scores of thin-legged colts running beside the mares in the pastures. I shall also be shut in when the sap buckets hang in the "sugar bush" and the great black kettles steam over the fires in the dooryards, and I can only hope that some of my friends will remember to put my name in the pot, and to save me some syrup and some maple sugar.

Forced to take my exercise on the island, I find new things everywhere, as I tramp round and round the trails. The snow under the evergreens is covered with last year's dry needles; the hemlocks, pines and cedars are putting on their new, bright green fringes. Under the rotting leaves, innumerable little new plants are pushing up, princess fern, wild

strawberry, Canada mayflower, and countless other small weeds and herbs, whose names I do not know. When the leaves and needles are raked away each stalk is seen standing in a tiny pool of clear ice.

The spring peepers are whistling in the lowlands, the hylodes blows his little bagpipe, away in the wood the grouse is "beating his throbbing drum"—no other description fits that thrilling sound—and the first honeybees are buzzing out from a clump of birches and winging away over the lake. Underneath all the other spring sounds is the measured "tonk-tonk" of the air escaping through the holes in the ice, and the thin, silver sound of trickling streams.

The red-headed woodpecker is here, his crown a spot of splendid crimson against the snow. "Ker-r-ruck, ker-r-ruck," he cries as he darts from tree to tree, his white tail coverts flashing in the sunlight.

There has been a deer on the island. Through my dreams one night I heard sounds of a great commotion, the cries of dogs, the crashing of animals through the underbrush. In the morning, not ten paces from the kitchen door, the snow was all trampled, soiled and

covered with bunches of long brown hair. Evidently, the place was the scene of the poor animal's agony, for those hairs were soaked with blood.

I grieved, for I have liked to think that the island was a place of refuge for all hunted things—at least for this one year. But if the dogs had dragged down the deer and killed him, what had become of the carcass? I wondered. They could not have eaten it so clean that no trace of skin or bones remained. I pondered this as I followed the deer's small, shapely hoof-prints from the shore and up over the hill and through the bushes all hung with bunches of tell-tale brown hair. I traced the dogs' tracks also, as they crossed and recrossed the trail, and following them came to an old mica pit, hidden far back among the cedars a gash in the hillside, ten or twelve feet deep and four or five yards long, ringed round with bushes and with a young birch growing in its depths. Indeed, I fell headlong into that hidden pitfall, and had time to hope, as I went down, scrambling over the edge and clutching at branches, that I was not going to land full on a wounded deer.

All tracks stopped at this pit, and the mys-

tery remained a mystery until late in the spring, when it leaked out that Andy and George Drapeau had heard the cries of the hounds, had watched their chance, had come over, dragged off the dogs, and skinned and carried away the deer.

Now the season for hunting deer lasts from November first to November fifteenth. Only one deer may be shot by each hunter. No hounds may be allowed to run at large during the closed season and any dog found running a deer may be shot on sight, and the person shooting this dog may not be prosecuted. Thus the month of March is not the time for fresh venison. Venison out of season is "mountain goat," to be eaten privately and without boastfulness. Nor is it safe to display a deer's spring coat. But if the Drapeaus had left me that hide, would I have informed on their dogs? I wonder.

My own stupidity robbed me of the only other deerskin rug that I might have had. Little John Beaulac offered me a beautiful —and seasonable—one which I bought and sent to the squaw at Maskinonge for tanning. Some weeks later I mentioned my good fortune to William Foret.

"Are you having the hair left on?" he asked.

"Hair left on!" I echoed. "Of course. I never heard of having the hair taken off. I want the skin for a rug."

"Well, you'd ought to have said so," said William. "Mostly they tans them for leather round here. They makes fine moccasins and mittens."

Sure enough, that Indian woman had patiently scraped off all the hair and I received a superfine piece of buckskin, which was presented to Little John, I having no use in the world for moccasins or mittens when I should return to the city.

The Drapeaus live on a long peninsula to the west of this island and half a mile away. From this dock I see their barns in silhouette against the sunsets. Their land rises in fold on fold of meadow, with here and there a clump of cedars or maples, then a soft slope and slanting cornfield. Their house is the typical Canadian log shack, a building about sixteen by twenty feet, divided by a board partition into a kitchen and a tiny bedroom. A trap door opens into the cellar; a ladder leads up to the loft where the boys sleep. There

is a shed, built at right angles to the south wall, and here Mrs. Drapeau keeps her wash-tub, churn, and milk separator. The place is always crowded with lounging men; the dogs are everywhere under foot, and the air

"THE DRAPEAUS LIVE ON A LONG PENINSULA TO THE WEST OF THIS ISLAND"

is thick with the smoke from many old pipes. Herring nets hang from the rafters, harness on the walls; drying skins are stretched across the uprights. In the muskrat season dozens of furry, brown rats are nailed, by their tails, to the outside walls, and inside the house

great pails of bloody water, piles of raw skins, and heaps of rats fill the small room.

The Drapeaus believe in the division of labor, and the work of the family seems portioned out in a thoroughly satisfactory way. Andy, the eldest son, is the farmer, Lewis the hunter and George the fisherman.

Mrs. Drapeau, though not an old woman, goes back to the early days of the settlement and knows all the hardships of pioneer life.

"I mind the time," she says, "when this land was all wilderness and when the bears and the wildcats come up to the very door. Once I seen four bear start over across the lake from Blake's point to your island. They swum across the narrows, the old he-bear in the lead, the biggest of the young next, then the little cub and the mother behind. Me an' the boys was in the boat—we had been a berryin'—and when the boys seen them bear they went wild. They rowed up along the island after them, but they couldn't go fast enough with me in the boat, so they landed me and rowed along to head off the bear, an' blest if they didn't turn 'em right back along the shore to where I was a sittin'. I was right in their tracks.

" 'You come back here an' git me,' I yelled,

'an' don't you do another trick like that agin, the longest day you live.'

"There was I a-hollerin' an' the boys a-laughin' an' the bear a comin'. Why, I might 'a' been kilt."

"What became of them?" I asked.

"The bears? Oh! they got away. What with me a-screechin' an' the boys a shootin' they was so scared that they climbed off the far side of the island, an' the last we saw of them they was over to Henderson's Bay, their heads just out of water."

Mrs. Drapeau tells of the day when she and her husband came over to their farm in a little flat-bottomed punt, a calf, the beginning of their herd, tied foot to foot and bellowing in the stern. It was a hard fight to clear the land and bring it to some sort of cultivation, and in a few years Drapeau was killed in a lumber camp, leaving her with four young children to feed. She describes the long winter nights when she spun, carded, and wove the cloth that kept their shivering little bodies covered against the bitter cold, of the back-breaking days in the fields when she hoed the potatoes and planted the corn, that there might be food for the hungry mouths, and of

the long months when she worked at the miners' boarding house, cooking and washing for a score of men.

"I never could have done it if it hadn't been for my neighbors," she said. "They was awful good to me. The men cut my wood every winter as come an' ketched me my fish until the boys was big enough to work. Eh! but I did have the hardest time the year my man died. Scarce was he laid in the ground when the two biggest boys come back from the school at Loon Lake with the smallpox. George and Andy had it and they had it fearful bad. I thought sure the other two would have it too. The health doctor come up all the way from Queensport an' nailed a notice on my door, tellin' the neighbors to keep away, and he forbid me to cross the lake, on fifty dollars fine. So there I was, the ice just breakin' and me shut in with my children that was a dyin', as you might say. I didn't want to go to no one's house, nor to have them come to mine, but I had little or nothin' to eat on the place, and I feared lest my children should starve.

"But I done the best I could, and one day, when the ice was all broke, I heard Bill

Shelly, the frogger, passin' in a boat. I hollered to him the fix I was in and told him to fetch me some goods from the store an' to tell my father how we was shut in. Bill brung me the goods and we got along some way, and when all was over an' the boys was well, here comes Robinson, the health doctor, to ask how we was all gettin' along. He stood off, twenty paces from the door with his white handkerchief to his face. I was minded to set the dogs on him.

"'Why don't you come in?' I says, 'All's safe now. You needn't to be afraid. You shut me in here, with my dyin' children, and not you ner no one else come anear me, not even to the shore, to ask did I have so much as a hundred of flour to keep us alive. How did you know we wasn't all starved together? Get you off this land,' I says, 'fer you haven't got the grace of God in yer heart.' He got off and I ain't seen him since, but I ain't never fergot him."

All this she tells me, sitting before the fire, her gray woolen petticoat turned back over her knees, a black three-cornered shawl laid over her head and pinned firmly under her pointed chin. She was a beauty once. She is

a pretty old woman still, with her flashing black eyes and silver hair. Even now, at sixty odd, she milks seven cows, makes all the butter and cheese, cares for the hens, the turkeys and the pigs,, works a small garden, cooks for the boys, nurses them when they fall ill, and finds time to make wonderful patchwork quilts. Mrs. Drapeau can tell the names of all the quilt patterns known to Canada.

I love these patchwork quilts. They speak of thrift and industry and patience, and of the leisure of a life in which small bits of cloth are of more value than the time it takes to stitch them together. Who in the cities has time nowadays to sit and make a patchwork quilt? They bring up pictures of bedfuls of little children, sleeping snug and warm under mother's handiwork, and of contented women sewing in the firelight.

Their names are poetry—woman's poetry. The Log Cabin stands for home, the Churn Dasher is food, the Maple Leaf means Canada. The Road to Dublin, and the Irish Chain speak of the homesick Irish heart, but I like to imagine that the Prairie Rose was named by some happy woman who loved the wide and blossoming fields of this new land.

CHAPTER XV

GOOD FRIDAY, a heavy fall of snow and winter come again. The ground is white, the sky dull gray, the lake a dark, bluish green flecked with windrows of snow. It is more than a week since I have walked on the ice. It bids fair to be two weeks before I can cross in a boat. At this rate the ice will *never* break—I had to chop out the water hole again this morning. This waiting for the ice to go out is like waiting for a child to be born, and it seems almost as solemn. It induces a calm, philosophic, not to say fatalistic, viewpoint. You can't hurry it, you can't stop it, you can't do anything at all about it. You can only wait.

Again, as in the fall when the ice was forming, there is that strange blanket of silence over the island. There's not a rustle in the dry leaves, not a bird's voice, not even the scraping of a hanging bough. The ice field is growing darker, wetter, and cracking into long lines that form geometric figures—squares, triangles, trapezoids—until the lake's surface looks like a gigantic spider's web. For move-

ment there is only the water along the shores, creeping up over the stones.

The evening was cold and gray, with a rising wind that whistled up the rain. In the night came both the former and the latter rains and all other rains between; then Easter Day, warm and blue and beautiful. As the Easter lesson sank into my heart, along with the still beauty of sky and sun and waking life, the first butterfly, emblem of the resurrection, came forth from his winter sleeping place and fluttered to and fro among the yellow tassels of the birches.

The years remaining may be many or few for me, but to life's end I shall hope to keep some measure of the joy of that one Easter day. I pray that I may always remember the tender blue of the arching sky, the white of the wisps of floating cloud, the gray purple of the spring haze lying over the forests; its silence and its peace. Looking out over the breaking ice, I remembered the story of two boys who lost their lives in the lake only last summer. They were forlorn little fellows, held in bondage by a stupid, tyrannical father. They had never seen anything that boys love—neither a circus, nor a picture, nor had ever heard a band.

They had never been allowed to go even to Frontenac, the county seat, ten miles away. All they knew about was work and heavy sleep and now and then a beating. But they were boys after all, and one bright day they slipped away from the harvest field and went to the lake to go afishing. Hearing footsteps and fearing their father's anger, they tried to escape it. The younger boy jumped into a rotting punt at the shore and pushed off on the water. The elder hid behind a rock.

Out on the lake the old punt filled and began to sink. The little fellow, seeing that he was going down and knowing that he could not swim, called out:

"Good-by, Charley; Good-by, good-by," his piping child's voice sang over the water.

The elder boy heard him and plunged in to his aid. Both went down, and when, at last, the grappling hooks brought up the bodies, the brothers were locked in one another's arms.

A commonplace story, isn't it? Such accidents happen almost every day—somewhere. There's nothing at all in it but childish joy in freedom, dread of punishment, terror, then love and sacrifice, and, crowning all,

heroic death. I think of them not as "saints in glory" but as happy youngsters, trudging, hand in hand the streets of the Eternal City; seeing, hearing, tasting all the joys that life denied them here.

Resigned to the thought of days and weeks of solitude, I was surprised by the sound of a long halloo coming from the direction of Blake's Point.

It was Henry, standing on the extreme end of his land and calling over to me. His was the first voice I had heard for days.

"Come down to your point," he yelled.

Scrambling through the underbrush, sliding from rock to rock, plowing through bogs, wading through patches of snow, I reached the shore, to see Jimmie Dodd, trotting cautiously across the ice dragging his little handsled, while Henry directed his way from the point. The sled held loaves of bread, a pat of fresh butter—a great bag of mail and a box of candy and fruit—the Easter greeting from home. The water was flowing all round the shore; Jimmie could not come within many feet of the island, but I waded out on the shelving sand and Jimmie crept as near the edge of the ice as he dared and tossed the

bags to me across the open water. Then he trotted back again to the farm and I returned to the house to enjoy my feast alone.

Day followed day, slipping by swiftly, silently. The first phoebe has come back and is twiching his tail and screaming his "Phœbe, phœbe, phœbe," all day long.

Across the sky, in V-shaped wedges, the geese are flying over. From ever so far I can hear their "honk-honk," telling me why the April moon is the Goose moon.

The woodchuck, that lives in a hole by the sundial, comes out and waddles slowly down to the lake's edge to dip his black muzzle in the water. He turns his rat's face up to the sky, glancing hurriedly from side to side, his little pig eyes rolling, the white ring of hairs surrounding his snout standing like a ruff. He is so fat that his short legs hardly lift his red-brown breast off the ground, and his bushy tail drags as he goes. He walks with a rolling waddle, like a bear. His gray-brown coat is dry and dusty.

There are hundreds of wide-open clam shells lying on the sand under the water, pearl side up. They are the shape and almost the size of the soles of a pair of baby's shoes.

When I turned over the skiff, that has lain on the shore all winter, there was a muskrat's nest under it. The animal had scooped out a hole in the beach, and a pile of clam shells showed that he had feasted well.

But though all these other small animals are coming out, I am forlorn, for Peter, the rabbit, has disappeared! Up and down the island I have gone, calling him, but he does not come hopping to my feet. No one will acknowledge having shot him; indeed, it would be a hard-hearted hunter that would kill so gentle and so trusting a creature. So either the hounds got him or he felt the call of the spring and wandered away to the woods full of fresh green. I prefer to think he did that, but I miss him cruelly.

Here, as in Kipling's Jungle, spring is the time of new smells. All winter there were some good smells—the odor of far-off forest fires; the fragrance of fresh-cut logs; the not unpleasing, pungent scent of Blake's cow stable, that came over the ice to me on the crisp, frosty air, but now there is a very riot of perfume. The rotting leaves, the barks of trees, the swamps and even the rocks themselves, give forth an incense. The poplars

and the birches shake out sweetness from their waving tassels, the new green fringes of the evergreens are fragrant, soon will come the odors from wild cherry, basswood, and wild grape in flower, and the scents of the new ferns, and then I shall go quite wild with delight and shall long to shout my joy to heaven, as Rufus, the red squirrel, is doing now. Far out on a birch limb, in the sun, he is clucking and chirping away, his plumy tail waving, his whole little tense, rust-colored body jerking as he gives tongue to his spring ecstasy.

Rufus is not always so harmlessly employed. He and the phœbes wage perpetual war over a nestful of eggs under the eaves. One or other of the small householders must stand ever on guard against the red robber that goes like a flash along the beam. What fluttering of wings, what scampering of tiny feet, what chattering there is! But the birds will win, they put the squirrel to flight every time.

Once again I heard a call from Blake's point. This time it was Mary, out looking for new-born lambs. Her voice, borne on the wet wind, came clear over the water between us:

"How are you getting along?"

"Oh, not too bad," I shouted in the vernacular.

"We think the ice will go out this week."

"Never," I screamed. "At this rate it will last until June."

"Well, I don't think it. We tried to get over to Jackson's yesterday, and the middle of the lake was opening so fast we could not make it."

"I'll go to the shore every day at noon, and let you see that I am alive," I promised.

"All right," she answered. "Hang out a white cloth if there's anything really wrong, and we'll try to get over to you somehow."

And away went Mary, a lamb in her arms, the ewe bleating at her heels.

Then came a day of warm rain, followed by a high wind from the south, that drove the breaking ice before it and piled great masses of glistening white fragments on all the beaches. And, sure enough, on the next Sunday, the eleventh, Henry Blake and Jimmie Dodd came across in a boat, the first I had seen in the water for four months.

That morning, when I looked out, instead of the solid floor of ice that I had seen so long, there was a great stretch of dark and tumbling

water, over which two white gulls wheeled and dipped. For an instant I was startled. I felt as though the island had somehow slipped its moorings and was being washed away. Then I realized that the ice was gone and, so far as I am concerned, gone forever, and that the winter, with its bitter nights, its long quiet days, its flash of sunlight on silver surfaces, became as the memory of a dream.

CHAPTER XVI

WHAT is the first wild flower of the spring? Each of us has his own first flower. It varies with the locality and the special season. Here it was the hepatica, that lifted its little faintly blushing face from the edge of a patch of melting snow. I plucked it, remembering the words of Old Kate, at Les Rapides: "Ef you pluck yer first flower and kill yer first snake, you'll prevail over yer enemies for the comin' year."

I did not trouble her poor mind by inquiring: "What if your enemy is also plucking his first flower and killing his first snake. Who, then, would prevail?"

I know of no enemy, but I gathered the hepatica. Whether I shall kill the snake remains a matter of doubt. If it is old Josephine, who will soon be sunning herself on a flat rock at the bathing beach, I will not. That snake has been a friend of mine too long.

After the hepatica came the dicentra cucularia, or Dutchman's breeches—a wide patch of them, nodding from a shaded ledge of rock, and then the trillium, lifting its white

chalices by thousands through the woods. If Saint Patrick had known the trillium, I cannot think that he would ever have chosen the shamrock as his emblem of the Trinity. The golden-throated flower rises three-petaled from a cup of three green sepals. Below this is an inch or so of thick, green stem and below that the leaves, three in a whorl. So three and three and three says the plant with every part of its being.

The air is full of the spring songs of birds and the dry whir of innumerable wings. A colony of gold finches moved in last night, and they are singing like hundreds of canaries in the cedars. "Konker-ree," call the red-wings over in the meadow. "Purity-purity," sings the bluebird, and "Quick-quick-quick," snaps the flicker. Busy brown sparrows slip through the dry leaves. On an oak tree the woodpecker is playing his xylophone, sounding a different note on each branch that he strikes with his little red hammer.

From the drowned lands come the boom of the frogs and the rattling signal of the kingfisher, and to-day—the seventeenth of April—I heard the first call of the returning loons. The water is very still, with schools of pin-

long striped fishes swimming in the sunny shallows.

The leaves came out in a night. One evening there was only a purple haze over the bare twigs, and the next day the swollen buds had burst out into a very vehemence of leafage, and all the woods were green. The fields on the mainland also turned green that day, and on the island the wild cherry blossoms opened in drifts of white, that loaded all the branches.

With all this newness out of doors, the thought of fresh foods possessed me and I started forth on a foraging expedition, to find out whether the hens had waked to their duty, and whether the cows were ready to give milk again. Verily I was aweary of tinned milk, stored eggs, and packed foods of all varieties. So I took the skiff and started for the Jacksons'.

The Jackson farmhouse stands on a high hill, commanding the lake. From her kitchen door Anna Jackson can see every boat that passes. Therefore, long before one comes to shore, she is ready, wearing a frilled tea apron and a welcoming smile, when the panting visitor comes toiling up the steep slope from the landing. To-day the winds were contrary

and I took her unaware, by creeping along the shore in the lee, and Anna, in her work dress, was digging stones out of the garden.

Grandma Jackson was knitting beside the stove in the sunny kitchen. A peddler, a low voiced, dark-eyed young Jew, sat in the corner. At my entrance he began unpacking his big oilcloth-covered case, drawing out aprons, handkerchiefs, shirtwaists, stockings, until the floor was strewn with its contents. Every article that one could name seemed stowed away in that great pack—enough to have stocked a small department store. When all had been displayed he began putting them away again.

"That's all what I got," he said with a patient smile. Presently he shouldered his load and walked away, bending under its weight. We heard him coughing as he passed through the gate.

These peddlers begin their travels with the spring, being heralded by the telephones all along the line. It seems impossible that they should make a living, but I suppose they do, for, after being shut in for a long winter, few women can resist buying a ribbon or some lace when it is brought to the very door.

"That feller won't sleep at Joshua White's to-night," quoth Grandma Jackson, watching the stooping figure out of sight. "All tramps and peddlers and such like always put up at Joshua's. He'd give them all a supper and a bed."

But Joshua White died yesterday, and his house was the "wake house" now, for they still have wakes in this country—when the neighbors gather to condole with the bereaved, extol the virtues of the deceased, and partake of supper at midnight, when the whisky and the clay pipes are passed around. In this case there would be no difficulty about praising the dead man. Joshua White was a man of good standing, and wide charity, a good neighbor and a kind friend. The community mourned his loss.

"Joshua was an awful proud man too," said Grandma. "Do you think that he would ever carry a handkehchief with a colored border? Well, I guess not."

At that moment the telephone bell rang.

"Gran," said Anna, after a moment's conversation, "Mary wants to know the age of Alec's eldest boy. Can you tell her?"

"I dunno," answered Mrs. Jackson. "Let

me see. No, I can't remember. Ask Mary haven't they got some old horse or cow that they can reckon by? There's always some old critter on every farm that they counts the young ones' ages by. Alec's Charley was born the spring they bought old Nance. They must know how old she is."

Just then the three Jackson children came in from school, with their bags of books and little tin dinner pails. There was no running or shouting; they sat down quietly at table. Six-year-old Beryl's small face was pale and grave. She had started that morning at seven o'clock, had walked four miles to school, had sat all day on a hard bench with her little feet dangling. At noon she had eaten her dinner of cold potatoes, "bread and jell," cake and pie, and at four o'clock she had started home again, trudging those four long, muddy miles to a put-away supper. No wonder she looked subdued. She was tired in mind and in her frail, small body, but she is getting an education. Beryl is at the head of her class. She tells you this with a little grown-up air.

It seems a topsy-turvey thing, this way of keeping schools open during the winter, when only the children living close to the school-

houses can reach them through the snowdrifts and the mud, and closing them in summer when the roads are good. I should turn things the other way round, and give the long holiday in winter; but I am told that my plan would never do. The farmers need the children. So in the rural districts the weeks spent at lessons are few. It is only in the spring and fall that the children can go to school and there is no such thing as "regular attendance," that bugbear of public instruction.

After all, I fancy that the youngsters learn as much while they toss the hay in the clean, hot meadows, or when they drive the cattle along the shady roads to the lakes, as they would if penned in the little one-room houses, where some eighteen-year-old girl, just from high school, struggles with the work of all the grades at once.

This thing of getting an education is a mighty matter in Canada. The roads are dotted with schoolhouses, the papers have long columns of advertisements for teachers, and it is always specified as to whether Catholic or Protestant is needed. It seems the dear ambition of each family to produce at least one teacher, and the Normal School at

Queensport turns them out by the score. On Monday mornings and Friday afternoons vehicles of every description travel to and from town, taking the girls home for Sundays and back for the week's work.

Students hire a room in Queensport for two dollars a month, and with it goes the privilege of cooking on the family stove and sitting in a warm room to study. Those who live near enough to town bring their food from home, so food costs them nothing. Thus they work their difficult way through to the little country schools.

My neighbor, Mrs. Spellman, is doubly proud, for her two daughters are teaching, one in Alberta, the other in far-away British Columbia.

"It was hard work to give them their training," she says. "Their father had no patience with the notion of sending them to high school, so he wouldn't help. But I made up my mind that they should have their chance. They'd not be tied down to a farm all their days, as I've been. Mary, my eldest, was always such a home girl too. She wouldn't hear of leaving me until I promised that she should come home every week. There wasn't

anyone to drive her to town and back but me, but I seen to it that she got home. Every Friday noon I'd harness up and go for her, coming back long after dark. Every Monday morning I'd be up before day, to feed the horse and cook breakfast in time to take her back to school again, and she never was late. I always had her there by nine o'clock. Sometimes the roads were so dark that I'd drive all the way with the reins in my two hands. I was afraid to hold them in the one hand lest I should get them crossed in the darkness and pull the horse out of the road and into the drifts. I'd feel sometimes as though my hands was frozen. But I never missed a week all those two long years. When Nellie, my second girl, went, it wasn't so hard for me. The two stayed in Queensport together, and they didn't get so homesick. Yes, it was a hard pull, but I'd do it all over again, for my children did well. They stood at the head of their class. I'm proud of them when they come home, summers."

I have often wondered at these little schoolma'ams, with their youth, their high spirits, and their wholly innocent love of pretty clothes and beaux and good times. They have

to board at one house and another, accustoming themselves to all sorts of food, all kinds of families. They must toil through rough weather to their work. They must learn to please all parents, to conciliate school boards and supervisors. They must have sense to steer a difficult way through neighborhood prejudice and to avoid giving rise to gossip. A task for a strong woman, it has always seemed to me, but I wonder no longer that so many succeed in it, since I know something of the strength of the mothers who stand behind them.

CHAPTER XVII

THE mudcat season has come. After the winter's diet of salt herring, and before the open season for bass and pickerel, comes the mudcat, alias bullhead, to give us the taste of fresh fish again. From April fifteenth until the fifteenth of May is the closed season for pickerel, and from April fifteenth to June fifteenth it is forbidden to fish for bass, so now the humble mudcat comes to his own.

Over on the Drapeaus' shore the men are all skinning bullheads for market. They have rigged up a machine that twists off the heads and strips off the skins at one turn of a handle. Andy Drapeau dips the fish out of the live box, Black Jack skins and beheads them, George Drapeau rakes away the offal, Harry Spriggins and Lewis Drapeau pack the fish in barrels. The whole shore reeks of them, the beach is red with their gore, for your bullhead is a very bloody fish. He is an ugly creature—great head, thorny spines, wicked-looking mouth, but he tastes very good indeed, if one has not seen Black Jack skin him.

I have come in for the usual present, and have to restrain my friends, or they would give me at least a half barrel.

"Kin you git their inside out, ef I take the hide offen them?" asks Black Jack. And I assure him that for the sake of fresh fish I can do anything.

John Beaulac was not there. The Beaulac baby—my godson—was "awful sick."

Later in the day came young Louis to the island to ask for the loan of some alcohol. The doctor had seen the child, by chance, as he was passing through the farm on his way to the lake, and had prescribed a warm bath and an alcohol rub. Young Louis' eyes were big with horror. To wash a sick child was evidently the same thing as killing it outright. I supplied the alcohol and, gathering up clean sheets, soft towels, a new washcloth and talcum powder, took shipping for Loon Lake.

Rose Beaulac sat in the center of a red-hot room, the window shut, the door shut, every chair, box and square foot of floor space occupied by a child or a dog, and held the gasping, moaning baby, despair in her face. One look at its crimson cheeks and glazed blue

eyes told me that it was an ill child indeed. My thermometer showed a temperature of a hundred and four when it came out from the burning little armpit.

John stood beside the woodpile and called me as I left the house.

"Was the baby very ill? Ought he to send for the doctor?"

It was "Yes" to both questions.

Then John did some figuring in his mind. His beady black eyes stopped twinkling, his face grew stern and set. This has been a hard winter for Jack. The war stopped the export of mica and the mines have been shut down. Last year was a wet season when the hay floated in the meadows and the grain sprouted in the stooks. It has been almost impossible to make ends meet, but if the child needed the doctor—well, he must be called and he'd be paid somehow. John left the decision to me. I must call the doctor if I thought best.

So away up the lake, three miles to the telephone, I rowed, and the doctor promised to come the next day.

"Tell John to have a boat at Henderson's landing for me, at seven-thirty. I can't make the fifteen miles there and back over these

roads to-night. Meanwhile keep up the bathing and the alcohol rubs, and tell Rose to keep that door open. Don't forget that. Tell her that child must have plenty of air"—an injunction that Dr. LeBaron did not in the least expect to have obeyed when he gave it; it was merely a part of his general course of education.

How did those eight people manage to breathe in that stifling room; how could that ill child survive in that foul atmosphere? I wondered, as I laid my weary body down on my clean, cool bed. And if I were worn out, what must Rose be, who had sat for three nights with that tossing, suffering baby in her arms?

Whether the lake is more beautiful in the early morning or at sunset, I have never been able to determine. At six o'clock, as I pushed off from the dock on the blue water, the thrasher's liquid song followed the rhythm of the oars. Out on the open bay the swallows wheeled and dipped all round the boat, so near that I could have touched their burnished blue-green backs. On the beaches the sandpipers ran tipping up and down, their plaintive piping mingling with the robin's

song. A gentle breeze roughened the water and every little ripple that hurried to the shore was tipped with a winking star.

At Beaulac's all was in readiness for the doctor. Rose's eyes were glazed with sleeplessness, her face lined with fatigue; but she had found strength to comb and braid her dark hair, the children's faces had been washed, and the baby had been dressed in a little new pink cotton frock. There was a dishpan full of newly hatched turkeys behind the stove, for even if one's child is dying one must try to save the fowl, and there was a basket of young kittens under the bed. But Richard, the pet lamb, had been banished to the meadow and the hounds were tied to the fence. John had gone for the doctor. Mary was alone with the ill child. She had done all she could, she could only wait.

"I'm glad you got me his picture," she said with a piteous little smile and looking over at a kodak print of the baby that we had taken some weeks before. "He's never been nowheres to have his picture took. I guess I'll be glad of that one."

Far out on the shining bay we saw the boat returning. There was only one figure in it.

John was coming back alone. The doctor had been stopped by an accident case; he could not come until evening. Rose's lips trembled, but she made no complaint. What was the life of one baby when there were so many, so many that needed the doctor?

Back to the island for my midday meal, back to Loon Bay to meet the doctor. This time there were two figures black against the evening sky. John was rowing with quick jerks of the short, straight oars. In the stern sat a bulky shape digging away with a paddle. Under its weight the upward pointing bow waved from side to side. Over the gunwale amidship came a steady stream of water. Mrs. LeBaron, the doctor's wife, crouched on the bottom, was bailing away for life.

"By gol!" said John, in an aside to me, as the party climbed the hill. "By gol! but the doctor iss a heavy man. I thought she was over two, three times."

Oh, the method of these country doctors! There's no talk of "Call me in the night if the change should come." No promise: "I'll see you the first thing in the morning." No, Dr. LeBaron only gave his verdict. The baby had pneumonia. The right lung was suffused. He

was a very ill child, but he might pull through —no one could tell. And all the time the doctor's deft hands were making up powders, counting tablets, measuring drops. On every package he wrote the day and the hour the dose was to be given. He set down the times for baths and nourishment, he told us what symptoms we might expect. He gave his directions over and over again, slowly, clearly, waiting for a repetition of his words. There was no haste, no irritation at our ignorance, only infinite care, infinite patience. Then he ordered out the children, the young turkeys and the cats, shook hands with the mother, stepped into the boat and was rowed away. If the child lived, we would not need him again; if it died, we were to notify him at once, and twice a day he wished me to telephone him the baby's temperature, respiration, pulse, and a general account of the progress of the disease. And then when excitement was at its height, someone broke my thermometer, the only one in miles; there was no more taking of temperatures—and the child got well!

The last time that Dr. LeBaron came to Many Islands it was to treat Harry Sprig-

gins' boy, who had cleft his kneecap straight through with an ax. There was no fire in the house. The Doctor had to build one and boil a pan clean before he could sterilize his instruments. There was no one willing to help him give an anæsthetic, so he had to sew up that wound while the boy sat and watched him do it.

"How in the world did the child stand it, Doctor?" I asked.

"Well, it was pretty hard on him," answered the doctor. "I told him that I'd thrash him within an inch of his life if he moved—it was the only way—and the poor kid gritted his teeth and swore like a trooper all the time. But the wound healed perfectly, almost without a scar, and the joint did not stiffen."

"You would be quite surprised to know how little charity work I do," continued the Doctor, giving me a very direct look from his keen, gray eyes. "There are not many bad debts on my books. The country people pay remarkably well, all things considered."

A quick little smile flits over Mrs. LeBaron's face at his words. I imagine she could tell quite another tale. Doubtless she knows

how much of time and strength and pity is given for which no money can ever pay.

"What do you call charity, Doctor?"

It is not, of course, charity to charge Johnny Bagneau ten dollars for driving twenty miles through the blinding snow; to sit, through the long night and half the day, beside the bed where little John makes his delayed entrance into life; to eat a breakfast of eggs in the shells and a dinner of potatoes in their jackets, and to stand outdoors in the bitter cold to eat them, because even the doctor, inured to filth and foul air, cannot eat in that poor room.

"No, the Doctor does not work for charity," the people tell me. "He gits paid for what he does."

Younger men come from the hospitals of Toronto and Montreal and hang out their signs in Queensport for awhile. They get a percentage of the town cases. They do not "go in" for the country practice.

"They young chaps is all very good when there's nawthin' much the matter," says old Mrs. Drapeau. "But when it's anything bad we wants the old Doctor."

Yes, that is it. When danger threatens we

want the man we know. He has brought us into the world, he has stood by us through life's trouble. It is he who must sit beside us, steadfast amid the gathering shadows, as the soul starts forth through the darkness of the long trail, to the land where there shall be no more night.

These country doctors! Up and down the roads they go, by night and day, through storm and fair weather, treating everything, operating for anything, nursing, instructing, overcoming prejudice, performing miracles of healing despite incredible difficulties. To meet them is to come face to face with the eternal realities. To hear them talk is to listen to a tale that cuts down deep into the beating heart of life.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE May woods are full of color; the crimson of the young maple sprays, the bronze and yellows of the new birch and basswood leaves reflecting the tints of autumn.

The brakes are unclenching their little, woolly brown fists, the new ferns are uncurling their furry, pale-green spirals. The dwarf ginseng's leaves carpet the damp hollows, from their clusters rise innumerable feathery balls of bloom. The little wild ginseng holds its treasure safe—the small, edible tuber hidden far underground. There is no long-nailed Caliban to dig for it here on the island.

The trillium flowers are turning pink. After about two weeks of snowy whiteness they have changed to a beautiful rose color, and oh, the perfume that comes blown across those far-stretching beds of trillium! No garden of summer roses was ever half so sweet.

On the mainland trail, that winds along the shore from Drapeau's to Foret's, the ground is blue with violets and yellow with adder's

tongue, straw-colored bell wort and the downy yellow violet. Wild columbine beckons from the rocky crannies, Bishop's cap and Solomon's seal wave in the thickets, the wet fence corners are gay with the wine-red flowers of the wake robin and the tiny white stars of the wild strawberry dot the meadows.

This is insect time. The air hums with the whirring wings of the May flies, eel flies, woolly heads, and the great mosquitoes. They cling in clouds on all the window screens, they come into the house by hundreds, hanging on my clothes and tangled in the meshes of my hair. The wild cherry trees are festooned with the webs of the tent caterpillars and the worms are spinning down on long threads from thousands of teeming cocoons. When I walk through the woods I am decorated with a pair of little, live epaulets.

The treetops are noisy with a convention of bronzed grackles discussing all sorts of burning questions in their harsh, raucous voices.

"Cheerily, cheerily, cheer-up," begs a robin in a white pine.

"I see you, I see you," warns the meadow lark.

"We know it, we know it," answer the vireos.

The sapsucker is back, beating a tattoo on the house roof. An empty wooden box at the door rings like a war drum under the blows of his hard bill. On the first morning he waked me I felt a sentimental pleasure in the sound; it seemed spring's reveille. On three successive mornings I heard him with an ever-decreasing joy. On the fourth I sprang out of bed, dazed with sleep, and, seizing a stick from the woodpile, I let fly at that diligent fowl, and he dashed away with a squawk. So low may one's love of nature ebb at four o'clock in the morning.

To-day, as I was dreaming on the porch, I heard a fat-sounding "plop," and saw a yard-long snake hanging in a crotch of a poplar, twisting his wicked head and lashing his tail. Immediately a brilliant redstart flew down and began darting at the reptile's eyes, screaming and fluttering at a great rate. The snake had probably gone up the tree for eggs, only to be driven down by the small, furious householder. In a moment more he slid down the trunk and disappeared under the house.

The snakes on the island are harmless, I am

assured. Therefore I do not object to this one's living under the porch, but I hope that he will stay under it, and that I shall not step into the middle of his coils some day when he is out sunning himself. The feel of a live snake under my foot would throw me back some millions of years and I should become, at once, the prehistoric female, fleeing in terror from the ancient enemy.

The young rabbits are out, hopping softly down all the paths. They look so exactly like the small brown plaster bunnies sold in the shops at Easter that, when something frightens them and they "freeze" motionless under a bush or fern, I can scarcely believe that they are not toys, after all. Comical little creatures! They eye me with such solemnity. I often wonder what makes babies and other young things look so very wise. They seem to know such weighty secrets, that all the rest of the world has long forgotten.

The old hares also are coming round the house again. One ventures so near and drives the others away so fiercely that I half believe he is little Peter returned to me.

Over at the farms the spring sowing is done—the wheat, the barley, and the oats; and

in the long twilights, and under the Planter's Moon, the farmers are putting in the last seed potatoes. Seed planted at the full of the May moon gives the heaviest crops, they say.

In the furrows, the big dew worms are working up out of the wet ground, to be bait for the fish hooks. Here, our object in fishing being to catch the fish, we use worms, frogs, anything that fish will bite, leaving flies, spoons, and sportsman devices to the campers who fish according to science and rule.

Walking along the shore trail yesterday, I came upon Black Jack Beaulac, sitting on a rock, fishing tackle beside him. He seemed deep in thought and I wondered what new deviltry he was hatching there, for Black Jack is the tease and torment of the countryside. It is he who starts the good stories that go the rounds of the stores and firesides, and the slower wits fly before his tongue like chaff before the fan.

If Black Jack's tales on the other men are good, theirs of his performances are quite as well worth hearing. There is one of the time when he stole a hogshead of good liquor, and carried it off single-handed before the won-

dering eyes of the "Sports" encamped at Les Rapides. It was Black Jack who plunged into the icy waters of the lake to the rescue of the halfbreed drowning there, and it was he who came to the aid of poor, terrified Rebecca North, whose husband had gone suddenly deranged and was running amuck. The poor crazy giant has never forgotten the treatment he received at those great hands. Long after his madness was past he spoke with awe of Black Jack's powerful grasp.

Again there is the story of the race on the ice of Henderson's Bay that will never lose its flavor. I heard it from Uncle Dan Cassidy one wet Sunday afternoon, as we sat round the Blakes' kitchen fire popping corn and capping stories. Uncle Dan has a brogue as thick as cream and a voice as smooth as butter. No writer of dialects could ever reproduce his speech. Translated, the tale runs thus:

There was to be a great race to which anyone having a horse was welcome. Yankee Jim Branch, a cousin of Black Jack's, had an old nag, fit for little, which he entered by way of a joke. Black Jack, being temporarily out of horses, in consequence of some dealing with the local storekeeper and a chattel mortgage,

was not included in the company. There had long been a feud between Black Jack and Yankee, so it was considered a good thing that they were not both to be represented in the contest.

It was a great occasion. The course was staked out on the ice with ceremony, little cedar bushes were stuck up to mark the quarter miles, and there was a flag at the judge's stand. William Foret held Joe Bogg's big silver stop watch to mark the time, Andy Drapreau had a stump of pencil and an old envelope on which to record it and the stakes were as much as two dollars.

The start was made, all horses had run, and the race, oddly enough, lay between Bogg's gray and Yankee's old hack, when—

"Ping!"

A shot sang out from somewhere, far back on the point, and Yankee's horse dropped like a stone. His driver was leaning far out over the wretched creature's back, belaboring him with a great gad. The halt was so sudden that away he went, straight on over the horse's head, landing hard on the ice. Up he jumped raging, and ran back to the stupified group at the stand.

"Is any man in the crowd got his gun?" he demanded.

Every man was abundantly able to prove that his gun rested behind the door of his own cabin.

"Is Black Jack in the crowd?" inquired Yankee.

He was not, and Yankee was immediately convinced that his cousin, Black Jack, had fired that shot.

Then in the midst of the excitement Black Jack himself appeared, striding unconcernedly down the hill. He had been hidden among the bushes, far back on the point, and, unable to endure the thought of Yankee's bragging if his horse should win, had raised his gun and shot the wretched animal, at the very instant of victory, and when, in Yankee's mind, the two dollars was as good as spent.

History does not tell what Yankee did to get even. Probably nothing, for no one in the countryside cares to interfere with Black Jack. He is known as a man of his hands and a good person to let alone.

All this and more I remembered when I saw Jack sitting on the shore. But he was not wearing his usual devil-may-care swagger

and cheerful grin. Instead, his square, dark face was grim, his great shoulders were bent, his long arms hung relaxed and his black eyes gazed moodily over the water. He looked tired and gaunt and gray. Presently he rose heavily and, without seeing me, strode off to his boat, stepped in and rowed away and the next I heard of him, he had enlisted and was off to Valcartier to learn to be a soldier.

Following his example went Little John Beaulac and his son Louis, to the despair of poor Rose, and later, Charley McDougal and George Drapeau.

"It's the meal ticket with those fellows," commented Henry Blake. "What do they know about this war? They don't even know what they'll be fighting for. No, it's the money they're after. The mines are not working, there's little or no wood-cutting to be done, and they're up against it for food. Jack thinks that he'll get a pension for his woman and a bounty for each one of the kids. The recruiting sergeants get so much a head for every man they bring in and so, of course, they promise these poor fellows anything. But they find out different after they've enlisted. Black Jack'll never stick at it. He'll desert,

and if he does they'll never catch him. He's here to-day and fifty miles away across the hills to-morrow. He travels like a mink, Black Jack does."

Poor Jack! He will find the restraint of barracks and drill intolerable, he who has never known any law but his own will. Will he stand the life? I wonder.

CHAPTER XIX

NOVEMBER'S moon is said to be the Indian's Moon of Magic, but here the June moon is the wonder moon and "the moon of my delight." It sails resplendent in a luminous sky, pouring its brightness down on a lake that gleams like a silver shield. Its beams rain down through the leaves in a drenching flood of light, to lie in shining pools on the mossy ground. It illuminates the hidden nooks of the forest, it makes the stems of the birches look like slender columns of white marble, and the woods are so bright that half the flowers forget to shut their eyes, and stay wide open through the night. Slender, tall irises stand like ghost flowers in the swamps; the thousand little bells of the false lily of the valley—the Canada May Flower—swing in the breezes that run along the ground, and on the low, south point of the island the rushes rattle stiffly and bow their heads as the wind passes over them. They are the Equisetum, the Horsetail rush, known to the Pilgrim housewives as scouring rushes, with which they used to clean their pots and pans.

Mary Blake tells me that she has used them and that the flinty, hollow stems are excellent kettle cleaners. They do not suggest anything so prosaic here in the white moonlight —rather they make me think of small silver spears held upright in the hands of a fairy troop, the small, green yeomen of the forest, on guard through the white night.

There is great rushing and scurrying in the underbrush, for the deer mice, the rabbits, and other small folk of the forest are awake and active. The birds too are wakeful and chirp answers chirp from one nest to another all through the night.

This is going to be a good bird year judging from the number of broken egg shells—blue, cream, speckled—that are cast from the nests to the ground. There is a continuous sound of faint, wheezing cries, the voices of nestlings, begging for food.

A pair of robins have plastered their mud nest on a beam of the porch roof, a red-eyed vireo has hung her birch bark cradle in a low bush under the kitchen window, some phœbes have built on the lintel of the house door. It seems impossible that so small a nest can hold so many squirming little bodies as must belong

to all those upstretched, gaping yellow bills. The parent phœbes do not hesitate about telling me in good round terms just what they think of me when I go too near their home, but the robins do not scold me, they only go off to a bush and mourn. The vireo cares not at all for anybody, but sits tranquil on her eggs and eyes me fearlessly.

I have seen a whippoorwill's nest, a thing, I am told, that few people ever find. It lies on the ground under the shelter of cedar poles that serves John Beaulac for a wagon shed, and is so directly in the path of the horses' hoofs that I wonder it has not been trampled into the mold. John's small daughter, Sallie May, led me to it, and, as we approached, a dark, slenderly trailing bird slid away through the underbrush, leaving her two furry balls of nestlings rolling helplessly on the dry leaves of their bed. They were about half the size of young chickens and were covered with thick down of a red clay color that had so fiery and vital a glow that it made me think of live coals showing through the ashes. We took one look and hurried away lest the whippoorwill mother should become frightened and forsake her nest, and two sweet and

plaintive bird voices be lost from the evening chorus.

At Beaulac's, where I stopped on the homeward way, a lively discussion was going forward. The Bishop of Ontario was coming to Sark, for the first time in many years, to hold service and to confirm, and there was much speculation about who would join the English Church.

"I'm a goin' to be a Catholic," announced poor Ishmael, the half-wit, peering out from a dim nook behind the stove.

"They tells me the priest kin cure the fits," he went on, hopefully, "but he won't do it fer you lessen you bees a Catholic, so I'm a goin' to jine his church."

"I favors the Baptists, ef I favors any," observed Bill Shelly, the frogger.

Whereupon John Beaulac retorted cruelly, that "We'd ought to send fer the preacher quick and have Bill dipped right off the dock, clothes and all," further explaining that the suggestion was made in view of Bill's general appearance and his boast that he had not touched water since early in the previous summer, and then only because he had "fell in."

Bill, so far from being offended, took this

witticism in excellent part, joining uproariously in the laugh that followed it.

For the rest of that week, telephones were busy calling a congregation. I was invited to drive to church in Mrs. Swanson's spring wagon, and reached her farm by a devious route on the great day. I rowed across the half mile that lies between the island and the nearest point of mainland and walked the wood trail from Drapeau's to Foret's. There William's motor boat was waiting to ferry me across the lake and up Blue Bay to the Swansons' landing.

Here also there was a flutter of excitement, for Susie Dove was going to be confirmed.

Clarence Nutting too had wished to be of the class, but at the last moment it had been remembered that he had never been baptized. As baptism must precede confirmation the Rector, amid the hurry and work of entertaining the Bishop and conveying him to and from the several churches where there were to be services, had been diligently striving to come up with Clarence to baptize him.

But each time he searched for him Clarence was away, either in a distant field or over in the next township, and so the Rector never

caught him, and when the service commenced poor Clarence sat humbly at the side of the church with the men, and could not come forward.

There was no trouble about little Susie. Her case was entirely clear. Her new dress and white veil were spread forth on the spare room bed for display and admiration; her hair was plaited in innumerable tight pigtails as a prelude to subsequent frizzes.

Susie looked quiet and subdued. There was a frightened expression in her china-blue eyes. She could eat no dinner, she could not even taste her pie, and soon she and Mrs. Swanson retired to dress. On the way to church Susie sat silent, clutching her new Prayer Book in a moist and trembling hand. On the homeward drive she confided to me that she had been very afraid of the Bishop.

"I knew my Commandments," she assured me, "but I was not so certain about the creed, and I was afeared lest the Bishop should ask me some hard questions."

Her face then was radiant. The Bishop had been kind and had asked no one any hard questions, and so this little one had not been put to confusion.

The church at Sark is old and falling to pieces but it looked lovely that day. Each window sill held a plant in bloom, its tin can covered with gay, flowered wall paper—geraniums, fuchsias, patience plants—the ornaments of many a parlor. Each window framed a picture of soft, rolling meadows, fruit trees in bloom, homesteads nestled in the hollows, and, over all, stretches of blue sky, flecked with wisps of floating vapor. In the center of the church sat the group of ten or a dozen candidates for confirmation. Through the misty veils their young faces looked out, awed and grave and very sweet. There had been a great disappointment for little Mary Spellman, for her veil had not come from town with the rest. She looked like a gentle little nun, with a square of plain white muslin laid over her flaxen head. Most of these girls will not wear bridal dress at their weddings, so confirmation is the one great occasion in their lives when they can put on the dignity and the mystery of the veil.

"Defend, O Lord, this thy child with thy heavenly grace"—The words seemed to reach me from a great way off, repeated each time the Bishop laid his hands on a bowed head.

The Bishop's voice was kind, his tone gentle when, his sermon finished, he turned from the congregation to deliver his charge to the class. I do not remember much of what he said, but I have not forgotten his manner. It seemed to me, listening, that he must feel a peculiar tenderness for these little cut-off country parishes.

After service I was led forward to be presented to his Lordship. He said that he had heard of "the lady from the Southern States who was living alone at Many Islands." I could not help feeling that the Episcopal eye regarded me with a certain suspicion, as one not quite right in her mind—which supposition was, I fear, confirmed by my own behavior, for when Mrs. Rector said: "My Lord, I wish to present Miss X. to you," the unaccustomed sound of the title, and my own total ignorance of the proper mode of addressing one called "My Lord," gave me a foolish, flustered manner that must have betrayed me.

We locked the silent church, stripped of its flowers and white-robed girls, and drove along the tree-shaded roads to the shore, where the motor boat was waiting. The

water was so still and so clear that we could see every rock and pebble lying a dozen feet below. We passed over schools of big fish, bass and pickerel, hanging suspended in a crystal medium. Between the sheer walls of the Loon Lake Portage the sun was going down in a lake of gold and the rocks were purple and red in its glow.

I walked the home trail slowly, lingering in the falling dusk. The odors of the cedars, hemlocks, and basswoods came to me mingled with the wet smell from the bogs and the perfume of the tiny twin trumpets of the partridge vine, twining the damp moss. I came out of the dimness of the woods to the path worn along the grass of meadows starred all over with myriads of misty little globes, the seed heads of the dandelions. I pushed the row boat off on the quiet water, and drifted while "the moth hour went from the fields." The sky was bright with the rising moon as I climbed the island path. There was great scurrying of rabbits in the underbrush and away in the misty thickets the whip-poorwills were calling.

CHAPTER XX

It is wild strawberry time in lower Canada. The fields are carpeted with them and the fern-covered rocks hold each a little garden where the red berries hang over the water like rubies in a setting of clustered leaves. The birds are feasting royally and I walk along the edges of the meadows, gathering handfuls of the ripe fruit. No one is at home any more. When I stop at a house the women have all gone a-berrying. Thousands of quarts go off to the markets, or are cooked here into jellies and jam, for the delicacy of the winter is wild strawberry preserve. I had it every time I went out to tea. Now they give me strawberry shortcake and, O how good it is! No garden fruit can compare, in sweetness or perfume, with the little wild berry of the fields.

Not all my friends go berrying every day, however. Yesterday I was kneeling on the dock busy washing my clothes, when a heavily laden motor boat, with a row boat in tow, rounded the point and headed for the island. In it were Mary Blake, Mrs. Swanson, Anna Jackson, and Jean Foret. Rose Beaulac and

Granny Drapeau sat in the little boat behind and all space not filled by women of ample build, was piled high with pails and baskets.

"We've come to spend the day," they hailed me. "Don't get scared, we've brought our dinners along."

"Dinner or no dinner, I am glad to see you," I called back, waving an apron in welcome.

"We knew this would be our last chance to have a visit with you before the campers come, so we've come to have a picnic."

Ah! What a happy, friendly day! These women—busy heads of households, women of affairs—laid aside their cares, forgot their responsibilities and enjoyed their party with the simplicity of children. And how good was the chicken, brought already cooked in a shining pail, and the cakes and pies in the baskets! Mrs. Swanson had journeyed in to Sark to buy candy, and all that the store there boasted was the dear old candy of our childhood, little chocolate boys and girls and rabbits, sugar hearts with mottoes, jaw-breakers and pep-'mint sticks.

We sat long at the big table on the porch. We talked and talked, or, rather, they talked; I listened, marking the shrewdness of their

deductions, the keenness of their comment, the kindliness of their judgments. I heard all about the fine new store at Frontenac and the bargains one and another had found. They described the magnificence of the yearly celebration there when the Orangemen walk in procession. They told me that this year Joey Trueman, the storekeeper, had not scrupled to set off a whole twenty-three dollars' worth of fireworks by way of advertisement.

We explored the scant five acres of the island, peeping in at the doors of the little summer sleeping shacks, all swept and furnished for the campers, and then, in the pleasant languor of the afternoon, I brought out my stack of photographs and told all about my homefolk.

For I too have formed the photo-displaying habit of this neighborhood, a friendly, kindly custom that makes one free at once of the home and all the family. I have never gone visiting here without being at once presented with the album. Many a time has my hostess hurried in from the kitchen to ask: "Has Miss X. seen the pictures yet?"

Big, unmercifully true-to-life crayon likenesses of grandparents stare down from all

the parlor walls—ancestral portraits. There are photographs of all the brides and grooms and babies, snapshots of sons fighting "somewhere in France," of daughters gone out to make homes of their own on the far-off frontier, and there are the faces of those lying safe under the cedars in the little graveyards close at home. I have heard the life stories of all, and so it seems quite natural for me to hand out my pictures too.

As evening drew on and milking time approached, my guests gathered together pails and baskets and, as we walked single file along the trail to the dock, I tried to say something of what lies in my heart about all the kindness they had shown me in the year gone by, but the lump that rose in my throat choked back the words. They climbed into their boats, that sank to the gunwales under their weight, and I watched them away across the purple water.

My holiday is over. In a very few weeks I must go back to the city and take up my work —the same, yet never again to be the same. Here in the quiet of the woods I am trying to take stock of all that this year has done for me.

It has given me health. I have forgotten all about jerking nerves and aching muscles. I sleep all night like a stone; I eat plain food with relish; I walk and row mile after mile; I work rejoicing in my strength and glad to be alive.

There has been also the renewing of my mind, for my standards of values are changed. Things that once were of supreme importance seem now the veriest trifles. Things that once I took for granted, believing them the common due of mankind—like air and sunshine, warm fires and the kind faces of friends—are now the most valuable things in the world. What I have learned here of the life of birds and beasts, of insects and trees are the veriest primer facts of science to the naturalist—to me they are inestimably precious, the possessions of my mind, for, like Chicken Little, "I saw them with *my* eyes, and heard them with *my* ears." And I shall carry away a gallery of mind-pictures to be a solace and refreshment through all the years to come.

The camp is ready for its owner. I have spent many hours in cleaning, arranging, replacing, that she may find all as she left it ten months ago. The island lies neat and fair in

the sunshine, reminding me of a good child that has been washed and dressed and seated on the doorstep to wait for company. Never have the woods looked so fair to me, or the wide lake, where the dragonflies are hawking to and fro over the water, so beautiful.

This is dragonfly season. Millions of them are darting through the air—great green and brown ones with a wing-spread of three to four inches; wee blue ones, like lances of sapphire light; little inch-long yellow ones, and beautiful, rusty red.

To-day I spent three hours on the dock watching one make that wonderful transition from the life amphibious to the life of the air. Noon came and went, food was forgotten while that miracle unfolded there before my very eyes.

I was tying the boat, when I saw what looked like a very large spider, crawling up from the water and out on a board. It moved with such effort and seemed so weak that I was tempted to put it out of its pain. But if I have learned nothing else in all these months in the woods, I have thoroughly learned to keep hands off the processes of nature. Too often have I seen my well-meant attempts to

help things along end in disaster. So I gave the creature another glance and prepared to go about my business, when I noticed a slit in its humped back, and a head with great, dull beads of eyes pushing out through the opening. Then I sat down to watch, for I realized that this was birth and not death.

Very slowly the head emerged and the eyes began to glow like lamps of emerald light. A shapeless, pulpy body came working out and two feeble legs pushed forth and began groping for a firm hold. They fastened on the board and then, little by little and ever so slowly, the whole insect struggled out, and lay weak, almost inanimate, beside the empty case that had held it prisoner so long.

Two crumpled lumps on either side began to unfurl and show as wings. The long abdomen, curled round and under, like a snail-shell, began to uncurl and change to brilliant green, while drops of clear moisture gathered on its enameled sides and dripped from its tip. The transparent membrane of the wings, now held stiffly erect, began to show rainbow colors, as they fanned slowly in the warm air, and, at last, nearly three hours after the creature had crept out of the water, the great

dragon-fly stood free, beside its cast-off body lying on the dock. And

"Because the membraned wings,
So wonderful, so wide,
So sun-suffused, were things
Like soul and nought beside."

Certain stupendous phrases rose in my mind and kept sounding through my thoughts.

"Behold, I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed."

There it stood, that living jewel, growing every moment more strong, more exquisite, waiting perhaps for some trumpet call of its life. Suddenly it stiffened, the great wings shot out horizontally, and with one joyous, upward bound, away it flashed, an embodied triumph, out across the shining water, straight up into the glory of the sun.

When I came to myself I was standing a tiptoe gazing up after it, my breath was coming in gasps and I heard my own voice saying: "It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. . . . Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory."

Then, standing there under those trees, clothed in their new green and upspringing

to the sky, and beside the lake, where the young ferns troop down to the water's edge, valiant little armies with banners, there came to me one of those strange flashes of understanding, that pierce for an instant the thick dullness of our minds, and give us a glimpse of the meaning of this life we live in blindness here.

I had seen those woods, all bare and dead, rise triumphant in a glorious spring. I had seen that lake grow dark and still and lie ice-bound through the strange sleep of winter. Its water now lay rippling in the sun.

Since my coming to Many Islands, one year ago, the Great War has broken forth, civilization has seemed to die, and the hearts of half the world have gone down into a grave.

But even to me has come the echo of the Great Voice that spoke to John, as he stood gazing on a new heaven and new earth:

"I am the beginning and the end," it said. "Behold I make all things new."

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